Commentary

VOLUME NINETY-NINE • NUMBER ONE • JANUARY 1995

Comes the Counterrevolution
Norman Podhoretz

From Schnitzler to Kushner
Edward Norden

Alexandria on My Mind
André A. Aciman

In the Classroom
Mark Gerson

A Feminist Seder
Wendy Shalit

God and the Americans

Paul Johnson

Books in Review

Chester E. Finn, Jr. on "The Bell Curve"

Peter L. Berger / Edward Alexander / Daniel J. Silver / Nancy W. Yos / Gabriel Schoenfeld

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THE MOST DANGEROUS DRUG IN AMERICA IS

SILENCE.

Washington's drug policy has been one of the most expensive failures in American history.

But not talking about it is costing us much more than money. Elected officials aren't allowed to say that the emperor has no clothes. It's politically incorrect to suggest that the strategy that has cost us over 100 billion tax dollars just isn't going to work.

The streets aren't safer. The flow of drugs hasn't been stopped. The spread of deadly diseases like AIDS from unsafe needle use has reached epidemic proportions. The truth is painfully obvious, ignoring it won't make it go away.

Thanks to our present drug strategy, the United States has now surpassed some of the most repressive regimes in the world to become the leading jailer outside of the Republic of Russia.

Who benefits? Organized crime barons who fill their pockets from the illegal drug trade, which is estimated at over $40 billion a year.

Who loses? Anybody who gets caught in the middle, including police officers and innocent children. Disputes aren't settled in courts of law, but with automatic weapons in the streets.

BUT IT'S POLITICAL SUICIDE TO DEBATE IT.

When Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders said that the existing drug policy was "worth studying," she was censored. When Attorney General Janet Reno directed a review of mandatory minimum sentences for minor drug offenders, she was ignored. The silence is deafening. It should be alarming. America isn't becoming drug free...just less free.

WE THINK IT'S MORAL AND SOCIAL SUICIDE TO BE SILENT.

So, whose silence is it? It's yours, it's mine, it's the guy's next door. We can no longer sit quietly by while our nation continues to invest in a policy that clearly won't work. There's got to be a better way.

We all share a deep concern over the problems caused by drug abuse in our society. But the cure has become worse than the disease. There are effective policies that can be implemented today - policies that will make our nation healthier and more humane.

Our objective is to make sure th crucial debate is explored in local a national media and on Capitol Hi Many of this country's top judg mayors, law office and educators ha already contribut time and money help make sure that does. But we need your suppo your voice, your membership.

Right now, we have an opport nity to make memberships wo twice as hard. A major funder is wi ing to match them dollar for doll Your membership contribution $5o or more will bring you inform tion on how our campaign for a sa drug policy is progressing and hc you can participate. It will also bri you a year's subscription to o newsletter, a free copy of Friedm & Szasz's thought-provoking boo *On Liberty and Drugs,* and updat information on how you can becor more involved.

If it were possible for America spend its way out of this proble we would have by now. But, we ha always been able to reason togeth to find better solutions. Isn't it ti we broke the long, dangerous silen and found one for this?

It's time for ideas. It's time for change.

THE DRUG POLICY FOUNDATION IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION THAT PROMOTES OPEN DEBATE ON DRUG POLICY AND PROVIDES INFORMATION ON ALTERNATIVES.

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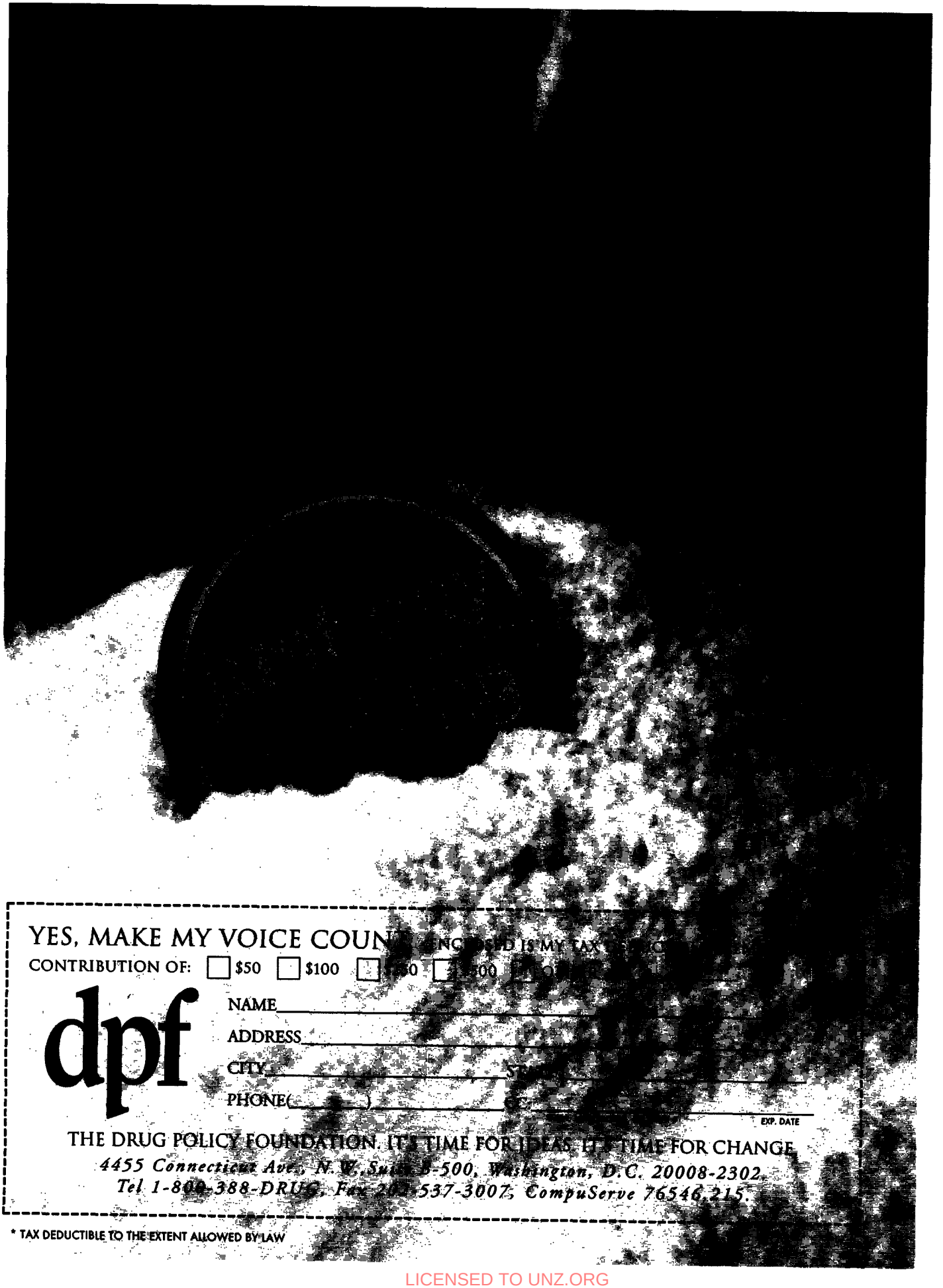

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Commentary®

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Letters from Readers

"What To Do About Crime"

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Having labored more than 30 years for strict gun control . . . (I helped organize the National Council for a Responsible Firearms Policy and was its executive director from 1968 to its dissolution in 1989), . . . I was more than disappointed to find that James Q. Wilson ["What To Do About Crime," September 1994] made only passing reference to the highly destructive weapons he describes as "almost certainly contributors to the lethality of American violence."

Almost certainly? Guns in the wrong hands are certainly, absolutely, significant contributors to the lethality of American violence. More than shying from such categorical certitude, Mr. Wilson shuns the whole policy issue by claiming "there is no politically or legally feasible way to reduce the stock of guns now in private possession to the point where their availability to criminals would be much affected." Nor does he see any way of curtailing availability to criminals without denying law-abiding people "a means of protecting themselves long before criminals lost a means of attacking them." While there is no way absolutely to deny criminals access to firearms (just as there is no way absolutely to prevent violence), politically and legally feasible ways can be devised greatly to lessen the easy accessibility of guns to criminals without denying such weapons, or even significantly curtailing their accessibility, to law-abiding citizens.

The ways to do this include: (a) state licensing (subject to minimum federal standards) for the legal possession of any kind of usable firearm; (b) holding each licensee strictly responsible for the safekeeping, legal use, and legal transfer of every gun he may own; (c) prohibiting the sale or other transfer of ammunition to anyone lacking a license for gun possession; and (d) a public-awareness campaign urging gun owners to make sure their guns, if kept at home, are not readily accessible to children, thieves—in fact, to anyone who lacks the crucial credentials for responsible possession of such weapons.

These and other measures are urgently needed in a comprehensive, balanced strategy to combat crime, especially the violent crime afflicting our country. A properly crafted policy affecting all privately-owned guns—a policy fully responsive to the imperatives of public safety and fully respectful of the rights and skills of responsible, law-abiding gun owners—would get the support of most Americans, including millions of law-abiding gun owners themselves. No such policy is currently on the agenda of any level of government, not even of today's gun-control movement.

DAVID J. STEINBERG
Alexandria, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

It is obvious what James Q. Wilson wants to do about pseudo-crime: lock up all the male underclass who do not measure up to his standards of morality. This attitude has undertones of a perfectibility-of-mankind utopia.

There are not enough jail cells to hold all the drug users? Well, build more, and in the meantime, although Mr. Wilson denies the wisdom of it, the practical result is that murderers and rapists are turned loose early. This has to be sheer madness. Observe the rash of senior judges who refuse to be a party to it.

Mr. Wilson clearly differentiates between "real criminals" and "drug offenders." . . . He later refers to his COMMENTARY article, "Against the Legalization of Drugs" [February 1990], in which he ignores marijuana but comes down heavily on heroin and cocaine. This is not so much because of their addictive nature as because of their "degradation of the human personality." What does he think ten years (let alone life) imprisonment does to this human personality? . . .

I have read what Mr. Wilson says about drugs and I have not changed my mind about the need for their decriminalization. It is hard to imagine how society could be worse off than it is now.

G.M. FOGLESONG
Livermore, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson . . . is, on the whole, objective and balanced and his proposals are often reasonable and practical. Nevertheless, his

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thinking about crime suffers from two serious flaws: (1) his approach to and understanding of the phenomenon of crime is conditioned by a resolutely middle-class sensibility; (2) his proposals tend to be bureaucratic and are derived from questionable notions about abnormal behavior. This has led him to the politically and morally dangerous tendency to overidentify the phenomenon of crime with specific types and groups. His collaboration with the late Richard J. Herrnstein on the book *Crime and Human Nature* led him even deeper into theories of genetically-based criminality. Such theories in turn lead to the notion that we can know who the criminals are even before they commit a crime. And that, of course, leads to preventive measures which, if enacted, would soon challenge constitutional safeguards. The fact that Mr. Wilson acknowledges the problem does not lessen the dangerous reactionary tendency in his thought, dangerous especially at a time when draconian solutions seem attractive.

The bureaucratic cast of Mr. Wilson's thought is reflected in the "community-based-policing" concept, which he pioneered. Since there is very little community upon which to base such policing, it becomes simply an extension of the police bureaucracy into the community in a more benign fashion. It favors a management solution over a human one. What is needed is an archeological dig within the neighborhood itself in order to find the material from which real communities can grow. The police should be a component in that process, not its centerpiece.

Mr. Wilson should not be faulted because he has sought in a sincere and, I believe, humane fashion to apply the tools of his academic trades—the concepts of political science and other social sciences—to what he takes to be the problem of crime in society today. . . . But our experience to date suggests that in the area of crime and punishment social science has offered very little that has been helpful beyond the development of certain tools of crime detection and prosecution. . . .

The subject of crime and punishment eludes understanding because it has been improperly classified as an object of social science. . . . Yet it is as ancient and as . . . fundamental as creation itself. . . . If there needs to be a discourse other than moral theology to talk about this phenomenon, it would best be called philosophic anthropology. Until we understand this, we will continue to indulge in pseudo-science and waste good money and good intelligence on a strange shadow dance that leaves the reality of crime and punishment unchanged.

KEN WHELAN
San Francisco, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson does not tell us "What To Do About Crime" but "What To Do About Some Kinds of Crime: Murder, Robbery, Rape, Etc." . . . What he ignores is the larger encompassing culture of criminal behavior in which the crimes that interest him are only a part.

When we follow the news, say by reading the *New York Times* or Canada's *Globe and Mail*, it is difficult to avoid concluding that criminal behavior is so widespread that it is no great distortion to describe it as endemic. Yes, there are murders and robberies and rapes, but there are also other crimes that appear to be irrepressible. I list a handful of recent examples from a virtually inexhaustible supply:

• *New York Times*, June 28, 1994: National Medical Enterprises Inc., one of America's largest psychiatric-hospital chains, pleaded guilty to paying kickbacks and bribes for referrals. The firm agreed to pay $362.7 million in settlement. . . .

• *Globe and Mail*, April 7, 1994: C.R. Bard Inc. of New Jersey admitted making faulty heart catheters and then covering up the defects. The company was fined $61 million. Two deaths have been traced to the faulty catheters and at least seventeen patients needed emergency surgery. . . .

• *New York Times*, September 12, 1994: Headline: "In Immigration Labyrinth, Corruption Comes Easily." . . .

• *Globe and Mail*, March 15, 1994: Deloitte & Touche, one of the biggest North American accounting firms, paid the U.S. government $313 million (U.S.) to settle charges it was negligent in audits of more than twenty thrifts and banks.

• *New York Times*, August 10, 1994: KPMG Peat Marwick, one of the Big Six accounting firms, agreed to pay $186.5 million to settle federal charges that it failed to audit a number of failed and distressed banks and savings institutions properly.

• *New York Times*, July 7, 1994: The "most prevalent form [of police corruption] is not [New York City] police taking money to accommodate criminals by closing their eyes to illegal activities such as bookmaking, as was the case twenty years ago," said the Mollen report, "but police acting as criminals, especially in connection with the drug trade."

• *New York Times*, March 9, 1994: Headline: "Managers of Co-ops and Condos Are Accused of Payoff Scheme: New York Inquiry Finds Contractors are Extorted."

I would be very pleased if Mr. Wilson would draw on his knowledge and wisdom about crime to tell us how the culture of crime arose and embedded itself in national life.

A.N. BARNETT
West Kingston, Ontario, Canada

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In his article, James Q. Wilson has provided us with a host of interesting ideas for reducing America's crime rate, but he is out of step with most law-and-order legislators and former U.S. Attorney General William Barr who support stiffer sentences for violent and repeat offenders as the primary weapon in the war on crime. . . .

Mr. Wilson is correct that sentencing felons to life for their third conviction is misguided. . . . But there is no legal reason why the judicial system cannot be reformed to incarcerate felons at the stage of their criminal careers when they are most likely to engage in criminal behavior.

First, eliminate parole, and require felons to serve at least 85 percent of their actual sentences. . . . According to a Gallup poll, 92 percent of the American people believe that criminals should serve their full sentences. But violent felons serve an average of only 37 percent of their actual sentences. . . .

Second, require mandatory minimum sentences for first-time violent offenders. Do not wait until a person is convicted for the second or third time. Let every potential murderer know that if he is convicted of first-degree murder, he will serve a minimum 25-year sentence without any chance of pa-

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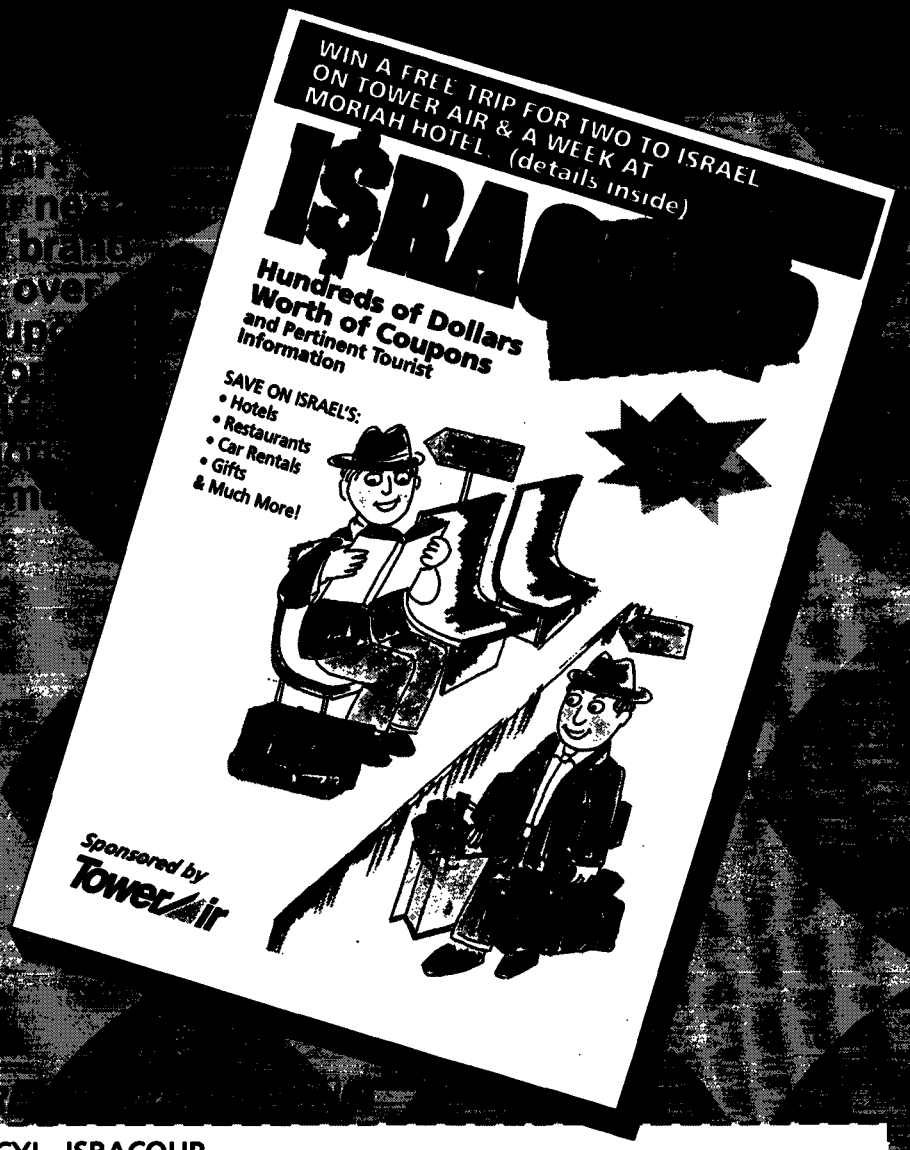

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role. Mandatory sentences for rape should be ten years and for aggravated assault at least five years.

Second-offense violent offenders should face the first-offense minimum plus five years. Third-time offenders should get ten years extra.

Third, reform the juvenile-justice system to treat anyone fourteen or over as an adult when he commits a violent crime. Since judges are loath to sentence juveniles to adult prisons, special juvenile prisons will have to be constructed to house violent juvenile felons until they reach eighteen years of age. Colorado has already begun this practice.

If these three reforms are enacted, . . . violent offenders will be put away and kept off the streets for many years, often until they graduate out of the active criminal years. It is also very likely to have a deterrent effect on young potential criminals.

All these reforms are attempts to tie the hands of judges and parole boards who have been responsible for so much crime by allowing repeat and violent felons to serve short terms or no terms at all. . . .

If we enact these reforms, we will have to build more prisons. . . . But if this is the price we must pay for a safer society, it is well worth it.

CHRIS GERSTEN
Anti-Crime Alliance
Bethesda, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I applaud your choice for the inaugural article in the series concerning the major problems facing American society. In "What To Do About Crime," James Q. Wilson once again demonstrates that he is one of America's most brilliant thinkers on the subject of crime.

Mr. Wilson, I believe, is correct in attributing the current prominence of crime in the national psyche not to skyrocketing crime rates, but to the fear of apparently random violence perpetrated "by youngsters who afterward show us the blank, unremorseful faces of seemingly feral, presocial beings." Irrespective of the actual probability of being victimized, the average American is overwhelmed by the media's reporting of violent crime. Images of senseless violence surround and threaten us. The nonchalance shown by convicted killers . . . seems to be more shocking than the murder.

Unfortunately, Mr. Wilson is equally well-founded in his pessimism regarding the likelihood that this country will seriously address its crime problems. "It's crime, stupid!" will probably soon be replaced by another concern as the issue-attention cycle evolves. . . .

As Mr. Wilson observes, the standard panoply of liberal solutions ranging from gun control to television censorship to midnight basketball leagues might make politicians feel good about themselves but is unlikely to reduce crime. Punitive approaches, such as mandatory sentencing, are intuitively attractive to most citizens, but are expensive and do not seem to correlate very strongly with reductions in crime. It is well documented that most convicts sentenced to long prison terms have already passed the peak of their criminal careers. The younger offenders still likely to commit hundreds of crimes receive lenient treatment.

Nonetheless, incarceration clearly preempts the crime that prisoners would have otherwise committed regardless of its deterrent effect on would-be criminals and criminals still on the loose. . . . We can never be certain of whether midnight basketball keeps junior from a life of crime; but if he is in a cell, we know he is not beating and robbing the lady next door. Despite their many flaws, "three-strikes" laws will at least curtail the number of fourth strikes.

It is highly appropriate to remove the "feral" predators from society at large, but we need to do a much better job of choosing whom we send to prison. Prison beds are a limited commodity. It makes little sense to allow nonviolent convicts, like the more than 16,000 federal prisoners sentenced for low-level drug crimes, to displace thugs who commit robbery, kidnapping, and assault.

CHRISTOPHER M. SCHNAUBELT
San Luis Obispo, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

James Q. Wilson's "What To Do About Crime" is a pragmatic and objective analysis of the leading concern in America today. . . .

I am a professional who has been involved in corrections and law-enforcement for the past sixteen years, so I am qualified to assure you that Mr. Wilson is right on target in reporting that 6 percent of the boys of any given age have a criminal orientation. In fact, FBI statistics, as well as information from other reliable sources, point to 5 percent of criminal felons committing approximately 80 percent of all offenses.

There is a consistent number of individuals in all societies throughout the world and throughout history whose personalities and psychological makeup are essentially criminal. . . . Other societies have dealt with this reality soberly and sensibly. In liberal democracies such as Holland, Denmark, Sweden, and other nations, "psychopath laws" are enforced with indeterminate sentencing based on considerations of public safety. . . . Classification and targeting of this criminal class would make a significant dent in U.S. crime rates.

Mr. Wilson is also on target about the futility of intrusive gun-control laws. . . . The problem is not the availability of guns, but rather the criminal use of guns. In states like Florida, Alabama, and Idaho, the concealed-gun permits now available to any qualified citizen have certainly not led to a rise in crime. In fact, in Florida, the enactment of the "carrying" statute immediately led to a significant drop in violent crimes. . . .

Effectively dealing with the criminal class . . . requires innovative concepts. I have worked with "intensive supervision programs" (ISP) for the past seven years, . . . but what is so promising now is that electronic monitoring is entering its second generation. Rather than home detention and curfew, the new technology (currently available) makes it possible for . . . adjudicated stalkers, released felons, pre-trial detainees, and others to be controlled . . . with cellular triangulation and tracking systems that will notify authorities of their location at all times. . . . An approach to an off-limits location would set off a programmed alarm. . . . The major benefit of this new system is that it would permit . . . inexpensive control over lower-risk offenders. . . .

Mr. Wilson is strongly opposed to the legalization or decriminalization of drugs. I can understand his view. I too am against the use of drugs. But my own long experience with criminal drug enforcement leads me to . . . the conviction that drug prohibition and enforcement simply do not work. As

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a veteran of the "war on drugs," with experience in arresting career-criminal parolees involved in the drug trade, I, along with growing numbers of my colleagues, have little illusion about the possibility of winning this particular war. . . . In fact, the "war on drugs" itself has become a major industry in America today, separate from the massive profits generated by the illegal drug cartels. . . .

In the course of this campaign, the drug offender has been denigrated and dehumanized. The criminal incarceration of drug users and abusers will certainly be recognized one day as a barbarism of our age similar to the imprisonment of the mentally ill in the 18th and 19th centuries. Substance abuse is a medical and behavioral pathology that requires rational professional treatment of the user, not criminal sanctions. The social politics of drug enforcement serve, probably unintentionally, to target certain groups unfairly. For example, black Americans comprise approximately 12 percent of the U.S. population and they account for approximately 11 percent of all cocaine use (powder and rock forms), but they account for more than 80 percent of all cocaine arrests, prosecutions, and incarcerations because of the differing enforcement standards for rock and powder cocaine. . . .

The view that drug (as well as alcohol) abuse contributes to criminality is simplistic and ultimately erroneous. There is a real difference between people who are compelled to commit crimes because of the artificially high price of drugs and those with real criminal orientation who commit wanton crimes under the influence of drugs. . . . Gratuitous crime, under the influence of either drugs or alcohol, should be a cause for aggravation, not mitigation, of the act. Possibly the real choice for public policy is that of the availability of treatment for substance abusers combined with the realization that as long as substance use and abuse do not infringe on others, they should be private matters.

MAX WINKLER
Denver, Colorado

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Though I agree with James Q. Wilson on almost all the issues he discusses, . . . I believe he has underestimated . . . the difference between the feeling of safety that exists in large European cities and the lack of it in our large cities. I am writing this letter on my way back to Chicago. I have been away for two weeks in such places as London, Paris, Venice, and Geneva. I walked the streets of these cities both day and night with a comfort that does not exist in Chicago. Indeed, the only time that I feel threatened in Europe is when my wife and I are on a dark street, there are footsteps behind us, and I momentarily forget that I am in Paris and not in New York or Chicago. . . . The feeling of safety that has been taken from us as residents of our wonderful country is very distressing.

PHILIP J. SCHILLER
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In his article on crime, James Q. Wilson mentions one important area only in passing: "There are only two restraints on behavior—morality, enforced by individual conscience or social rebuke, and law, enforced by the police and the courts." The former, "what custom and morality once produced," he apparently is willing to write off. But in view of the wealth of thought and knowledge from the past on this very subject, and the centuries of relatively effective law and order under its more ethical prescriptions, one must ask, why should we ignore it? . . . Why, merely because of an "enlarged spirit of freedom" is our dilemma considered "insoluble" except in terms of more police or silly government programs?

A more positive antidote might be found in a prompt dismantling of the supposed "wall of separation" now protecting us inanely from religion. One might start with Edmund Burke: "[R]eligion is one of the great bonds of human society; and its object the supreme good, the ultimate end and object of man himself." It is not too late. Things have not changed that much since Burke's day. . . .

In the end, regardless of all the "solutions" put forward by our current "sophisters and calculators," until the citizens of America do more serious reading and recover their understanding of history, truth, excellence, and respect for and adherence to religion and the prescriptions of the U.S. Constitution, . . . all the man-made law and cops in the world will not suffice.

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cated judges would have the wisdom to use restraint in preserving our constitutional system and, at the same time, understand better how to deal with criminals; law schools would have principled teachers instead of deconstructionist ideologists; legislators would not be visionless demagogues protecting their sinecures; the people themselves would comprehend the marvelous gift that once was their Constitution and perhaps exercise the courage to recover it; and intelligent people like James Q. Wilson would not have to write long essays on academic solutions to flawed public policy and could get back to teaching. . . .

W. Edward Chynoweth
Sanger, California

To the Editor of Commentary:

James Q. Wilson recognizes only two controls on behavior: morality . . . and law. What ever happened to the fear of God? . . .

Effective policing, swift and sure punishment, etc. are all necessary to stop crime, but they are not enough. To address crime without also assessing society's spiritual resources is to err in a peculiarly humanist way. The slippery slope is not a one-way street. Prescribing school prayer may put us on the road to an established church, but denying students a moment of silent meditation leads to godlessness and disintegration. . . . If our society is to be saved, it is time for a swing from secularism to that good Old Time Religion. . . .

Lawrence J. Kramer
Newtown, Pennsylvania

To the Editor of Commentary:

I wish to add one point to James Q. Wilson's excellent article. . . . In "A Nation of Cowards" (*Public Interest*, Fall 1993), Jeffrey R. Snyder . . . blames the current crime situation on the fact that we are, well, a nation of cowards. According to Snyder, "One who values his life and takes seriously his responsibilities . . . will possess and cultivate the means of fighting back." . . . Snyder points out that the much-reviled hand gun is indeed "the great equalizer."

Here in Florida, law-abiding citizens are allowed to carry loaded firearms in their vehicles, and concealed-weapons permits are relatively easy to obtain. Not too long ago, some juvenile predators were interviewed on the evening news and asked why they attacked tourists' cars rather than those of locals. Not surprisingly, the almost unanimous answer was that the youths could be sure that the tourists would be unarmed; not so with the locals. . . .

Dennis E. Berger
North Miami Beach, Florida

To the Editor of Commentary:

Thanks for "What To Do About Crime." In my 18 years as a post-World War II street-gang worker and settlement-house supervisor as well as my 27 years of university teaching about crime and deviance, I have never read so clear, concise, and practical an article.

James Q. Wilson correctly states that "Much of our uniquely American crime problem . . . arises . . . from the concentration in disorderly neighborhoods of people at risk of failing." He notes that this concentration is due to: the loss of functioning families who escaped the blight by moving away; racism; and "politics (elected officials do not wish to see settled constituencies broken up)." It is not only politicians who have a stake in maintaining this underclass, but also black leaders and ministers like Louis Farrakhan, Sonny Carson, and Benjamin Chavis. They rarely condemn the drug-dealing and violence of their constituents except to complain about black youths killing one another. And, not subtly, they have made anti-Semitism the rallying cry for these youths. . . .

Sheldon C. Seller
Riverton, Connecticut

[*Additional correspondence on this article, and James Q. Wilson's reply, will appear next month.—Ed.*]

The ADL Report

To the Editor of Commentary:

Midge Decter ["The ADL vs. the 'Religious Right,'" September 1994] argues that the Anti-Defamation League (which she refers to as "an established and highly respected organization dedicated to the protection and security of the American Jewish community") in its recent report on the religious Right has indulged in religious bigotry and liberal broadsides against this movement. In fact, the report, *The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance & Pluralism in America* goes to some lengths in respectfully recognizing the rights of religious conservatives and the legitimacy of their public activism. A few examples make this clear.

- "Like anyone else, evangelical Christians have the right to organize, to run for office, to lobby, to boycott, to demonstrate, to attempt to implement their views. More than that, a healthy democracy encourages and depends on their doing so."
- "[C]ritics err when they imply that the religious Right poses a concern because of its religiosity rather than its platform. The problems raised by the movement are secular." The ADL study calls the religious Right's grass-roots organizing a "remarkable democratic exercise."
- "[T]hose who object to the religious Right movement too often engage [in] the intolerance and stereotyping they purport to decry. Anti-Christian bigotry may be exaggerated by Pat Robertson and others, but it is not merely a figment in the imagination of evangelicals."
- "[M]uch of what this movement says it wants *is* right: most of us value strong families, better schools, a government that upholds its commitment to religious liberty. These aims have become increasingly vital at a time when our country's ills appear intractable and when many Americans say they feel dissatisfied, frightened, and angry, part of a society that has lost its 'guard rails.'"

Miss Decter accuses the ADL of using "guilt-by-association" tactics in the report because we spell out who the players on the religious Right are, and who their associates are—links established by those on the religious Right themselves. In this vein, might Miss Decter herself be using "guilt-by-association" tactics when she derides the ADL report because of a list (*which ADL itself supplied in its report*) of liberal groups we thanked for assistance in corroborating certain information? All of the organizations we thanked are clearly beyond Miss Decter's pale, because she sees them only as enemies of the religious Right.

The ADL is accused of dealing dishonestly with the question of stealth candidates. Miss Decter points out correctly that this has been a ploy of the Left as well as the Right. She fails to point out that the Anti-Defamation League has just as diligently bared and

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criticized the tactic of stealth candidates and organizations on the far Left and among anti-Israel propagandists. Should we have one standard on this issue for the far Left and another for the religious Right?

There is a disingenuous quality to Miss Decter's criticism because much of what she points out as faults in the report or "nastiness" is just not there. The ADL does not make a case that the religious Right is anti-Semitic. We do not believe that. We pointed out some examples of anti-Semitism or insensitivity to Jewish issues by some on the religious Right—but that is hardly the focus of our report. If we believed that the religious Right was anti-Semitic, we would not, along with other Jewish organizations, have met with the organizations and leaders of the religious Right at a national gathering in November.

Miss Decter asks why we singled out the conservative Christians. First, we didn't. As Miss Decter notes, we recognize and appreciate the religious Right's support for Israel—but we also have important differences with them on serious constitutional issues. We have many related interests in the church-state-separation area—interests that go beyond our basic task of fighting anti-Semitism. We have published reports on the far-Right; the far-Left; Middle East policy; European affairs; legal briefs in the areas of free speech, religious accommodation; and in many other areas, such as prejudice-reduction through our program, "A World of Difference." All of these issues are part of the ADL's broader mission—to promote a strong, open democracy, supportive of a diverse and tolerant society which we believe is healthy for American and Jewish security. Now, Miss Decter and the religious Right may disagree with us on school prayer, tuition tax credits, crèches, and other separation issues, but they have long been on the ADL's agenda, and we have filed many *amicus* briefs to prove it. These differences, strong as they are, can and should be expressed in a civil manner. We believe our report does so. We have not demonized the religious Right, and do not deserve to be demonized in return.

Finally, Miss Decter accuses the ADL of using materials more than ten years old to prove "a dark and

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In order to promote the Middle East peace process, President Clinton recently extended the signal honor of a state visit to President Hafez Assad of Syria. Our president's hope to wring any "concessions" out of Mr. Assad were unfulfilled. We must ask ourselves whether "Syria is a reliable partner in any peace agreement and whether Israel, from which many "concessions for peace" are being asked, would be wise to entrust its security to Syrian promises.

What are the facts?

A Rogue Country and a Rogue President. Syria is an outlaw country and is classified as a "terrorist state" by the United States. Terror is the most pervasive aspect of the Syrian regime. Much of that terror is conducted through "clients", such as the terrorist bands of the PLO, the infamous Hamas, and the Iran-sponsored Hizbullah, to all of which Syria extends protection and warm hospitality. Syria's most ruthless terror, however, is reserved for its internal opposition. In 1982, President Assad put down a rebellion in the town of Hama, in which he killed 20,000 people.

More cunning even than his Iraqi counterpart, President Saddam Hussein, he shares with him utter ruthlessness. disregard of human life and above all an abiding hatred of the West, which means primarily the "big-devil", the United States and the "little devil", Israel, the perceived outpost of Western culture, of Western democratic concepts, and of "American imperialism" in the Middle East.

Main sources of Syria's revenue are the large-scale and officially conducted narcotics trade, and massive counterfeiting of American currency. Few doubt that Mr. Assad personally authorized the suicide attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut in which 241 Americans lost their lives and in the blowing up of Pan Am Flight #103, in which 270 people died. Even today, Assad gives hospitality to surviving thugs of the Nazi regime, outstanding among them Alois Bruner, Eichman's deputy and main slaughterer. The terror in Israeli cities could not possibly occur if President Assad were to forbid it.

The Obsession with the Golan. Since the founding of Israel in 1948, Syria has attacked it three times, by surprise and without provocation. In the Six-Day War of 1967, Syria suffered a decisive defeat and lost the Golan Heights, a Queens-sized plateau. Israel has been in possession ever since. The Golan is of vital strategic importance to Israel because it makes a Syrian attack against Israel virtually impossible. On the Golan, Israel is protected by sophisticated electronic surveillance and warning systems and by one of the deepest and most formidable obstacle systems in the world. The Golan is desolate and serves no real purpose, except as a defense post for Israel or as an attack-launching pad for Syria. Syria is obsessed with the Golan and has stated over and over again that it will not make peace with Israel unless and until the Golan is handed back in its entirety. But if such an exchange—the Golan Heights for peace—should come about, Israel's continued existence or destruction would depend on the good will of the Syrian dictator or his successor. It's a risk that Israel should not be asked to assume.

> "For Israel to survive, the Golan must stay in Israeli hands. The Golan is the price the Syrians must pay for their aggressions. All things considered, it's a small price."

The conflict between Syria and other Arabs with Israel is not about land—it is about Israel's very existence. No other country in the world would be expected to yield indispensable strategic ground to those who are sworn to destroy it. One may ask why Israeli leaders, among them experienced generals, would wish to consider such a gamble. But leaders do make fatal errors in judgment. We only need to remember British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who in his quest for peace agreed to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and thus brought about the Second World War. Considering that Syria is a rogue country with a rogue president, Israel should not make its survival dependent on Syria's "goodwill". Yes, there must be concessions. But, for Israel to survive, the Golan must stay in Israeli hands. The Golan is the price the Syrians must pay for their aggressions. All things considered, it's a small price.

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guilty underside" to Paul Weyrich, the founder and president of the Free Congress Foundation. While we did write about all of those earlier activities—not found to be inaccurate, by the way—we also mentioned Weyrich's ongoing connection with Laszlo Pasztor who has worked with Coalitions for America at Weyrich's Washington offices. Pasztor's history is that of someone who at the age of eighteen joined the fascist Arrow Cross party in his native Hungary. Arrow Cross conducted a brutal reign of terror over Budapest's Jews. Pasztor was arrested by the postwar coalition government on December 5, 1945. According to his indictment, he "wore the emblem of the [Arrow Cross] party, paid contributions to the annuity fund, gave lectures about party aims, the Jewish question, problems of minorities and landowners, and in 1942 became a district leader of the youth movement of the party, which included 48 organizations." Because of his Arrow Cross membership and his activities as a youth-group leader, Pasztor was ultimately sentenced to two years' imprisonment and the loss of political rights for five years.

In the fall of 1988, Pasztor resigned from the Bush campaign's ethnic-outreach unit (along with seven others) when press accounts exposed his fascist and Nazi connections. Among our alleged sins against Weyrich, Miss Decter somehow neglected to mention that we wrote about his ongoing relationship with Pasztor.

In its report on the religious Right, the ADL did what it has always done—called the shots the way we see them based on documented facts and well-reasoned arguments pursuant to our policies and principles. We are saddened that, in this instance, Midge Decter and others feel that we have betrayed our mandate. The ADL believes that we have enhanced it.

ABRAHAM H. FOXMAN
National Director
Anti-Defamation League
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Midge Decter has it right: the Anti-Defamation League, in an unwise move, has declared war on the Christian Right. . . . Other Jewish groups have joined the campaign. But the irony is that the organized Jewish community has launched an effort to separate Jewish children from the public arena in religious day schools, at the very time it is accusing the likes of Pat Robertson of separationist fever.

The reason for this drive is the legitimate fear of a Jewish population decline. . . . There is a consensus among scholars and activists that only a good Jewish education early in life can arrest the rate of intermarriage. Hence, to survive, the American Jewish community must leave the public-school system. But this is the system that Jewish liberals have long endorsed as essential to American democracy and pluralism. These are the schools that Jewish liberalism fiercely wants to remain secular and free of prayer. . . . The Jewish fear of intermarriage, whether day schools are prescribed as a remedy or not, is, in modern Jewish liberal terms, a kind of oxymoron. The liberal Jewish culture emphasizes universalism. Everyone is fungible. If Pat Robertson campaigned against the intermarriage of Christians and Jews, he would get another ADL book written about him. Racist and bigot would be some of the terms hurled at him. Yet Jews have made such a campaign central to their drive for continuity. . . .

There might be a solution to this conundrum if Jews were to find a way back to the religious basis of Judaism, but the ability to solve the paradox of particularism versus universalism is beyond modern American secular Jews.

NICHOLAS WOLFSON
University of Connecticut
School of Law
Hartford, Connecticut

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Midge Decter is on the mark regarding the ADL's report on the religious Right; I found it to be snide, mean-spirited, petty, and full of the kind of bias and innuendo the ADL usually condemns. . . .

For example, Pat Robertson, whom the report terms the "Prime Mover," is accused of, among other things, being associated with public anti-Jewish pronouncements . . . in connection with the film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The facts are that the ADL had first been asked by Christian evangelicals, including Robertson, to condemn the film because of what they claimed was its blasphemous nature in regard to the depiction of Jesus. . . . The ADL then told the evangelicals that it could not condemn the film until it had been screened. After the screening, the ADL agreed that the film might be offensive to some Christians, but decided that the controversy was really a theological matter and a question of free speech into which it had no reason to intrude. . . . By that time, some of those who protested the film had engaged in anti-Semitic picketing (the chief officers of the studio that made the film, MCA-Universal, are Jewish). So when the ADL asked Robertson to condemn the picketing, he responded, what about our *prior* request to condemn the release of *The Last Temptation of Christ*? And there the matter ended. . . .

The ADL should have promptly condemned the issuance of the film by MCA as being insensitive to the . . . Christian community. The organization should be against the defamation of everyone, not just Jews. If a film had treated Abraham or Moses or Muhammad or Buddha in such a contemptible manner, I am sure the ADL would have issued a protest, and rightly so. . . .

The ADL's fixation and obsession with eliminating all vestiges of Christianity from the public scene is a mistake that bodes ill for the future. I have to agree with Miss Decter that the current report is a mischievous example of bigotry toward Christians. . . .

CARL B. PEARLSTON, JR.
Torrance, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Midge Decter's "The ADL vs. the 'Religious Right' " is an illuminating analysis, . . . but it would have been stronger if it had included a comment on the religious implications of the ADL report. Let me supply her with one.

Some months ago I attended a bar-mitzvah service in a Reform temple and listened to a short address delivered by the bar-mitzvah candidate entitled, "Why I Am Proud to Be a Reform Jew." His pride, the young man proclaimed, stemmed from the fact that, as a Reform Jew, he would be free to practice his faith in any way he wished. He would be subjected to no rigid requirements. As a Reform Jew, he would be free to choose or discard the holidays he cared to observe, eat any food he desired, keep the Sabbath whenever he felt motivated to do

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so. He could live his Jewish life in this fashion, he announced, and still be received as an equal and important member of his congregation. . . . I was appalled, not only at the young man's preparation for a Jewish life, but at the warmth with which his words were embraced by the congregation.

I am not suggesting that this incident reflects the theology of all liberal Jews, but I strongly suspect that it is what many practice. I also believe that many, sooner or later, but usually when it is too late to do much about it, become uneasy with this cavalier style of Judaism. Never having transmitted to their children a serious commitment to Jewish practice at home, they erupt in anger mixed with guilt when they hear about a plan by a group of evangelical Christians to introduce a nondenominational prayer in the local public school, or about preparations to erect a crèche on public property. . . .

Orthodox Jews rarely sit around fretting about the conspiratorial designs of the Christian Right. Secure in their adherence to Torah, they have erected an armor of religious conviction that cannot be pierced as easily as that of the liberal Jew. My suggestion to the members of the liberal Jewish community is to learn from their Orthodox brethren: that is, to worry less about the Christian Right and to spend more time raising their children in homes deeply permeated with love and appreciation of Judaism. . . . If that can be done (and I am not implying that it can be accomplished easily), the threat of the Christian Right will be viewed from a more balanced perspective as a normal and appropriate Christian response to the ills of our time.

EGAL FELDMAN
University of Wisconsin
Superior, Wisconsin

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Of course Midge Decter is right. *The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance & Pluralism in America* is more about secular political concerns than anti-Semitism. Since the ADL is "dedicated to the protection and security of the American Jewish community," it seemed to this non-Jew that the study failed in support of that mission. Instead, it needlessly raised unwarranted fears. The boy who cried wolf was not protecting his sheep, nor does the ADL in this endeavor.

MICHAEL WARDER
Executive Vice President
Rockford Institute
Rockford, Illinois

MIDGE DECTER writes:

Abraham H. Foxman claims that *The Religious Right* respectfully recognizes the "rights of religious conservatives and the legitimacy of their public activism," that, indeed, it "goes to some lengths to do so." Now, setting aside the fact that no one has accused the ADL of attempting to deprive religious conservatives of their "rights" but only of having done a hatchet job on them for ill-concealed political reasons, I find it interesting that the four passages he cites in illustration of the lengths gone to by the ADL to show its respectfulness all appear before the end of page 3. One of these is from Mr. Foxman's own foreword to the book—and all of them are torn from their surrounding context.

As for Mr. Foxman's charges against me—that it is I, not the ADL, who engage in guilt by association; that it is not the ADL, as I claim, but I myself who am guilty of one-sidedness and distortion, and so on—they drive me into that most tiresome of authorial tasks: to repeat what I have already documented.

First, guilt by association. For reasons of space, I mentioned just a few instances of this practice out of many, involving Pat Robertson and Paul Weyrich (the two characters discussed at greatest length in the book). In these an early teacher or acquaintance—or better yet, in the case of Robertson, someone who has at some time or other appeared on his television show!—is cited as evidence that whatever they say, they really harbor certain shady, anti-democratic or anti-Semitic, views. For all one knows, Robertson and Weyrich may or may not have thought and said questionable things, and hung out with questionable people in the course of their no-longer-young lives (so, I may say, have I myself, in a youthful leftist past; Mr. Foxman, no doubt, has been simon-pure). To cite such associations as *ipso-facto* proof that Robertson and Weyrich are at present dangerous to the American body politic is precisely what is meant by the term "guilt by association." This is *not* the same as pointing out that major, acknow-

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ledged, sources in the preparation of this book are a number of leftist organizations including, along with People for the American Way and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, feminist and homosexual-rights groups—a circumstance mentioned by me, as it happens, in the context of trying to understand how such an obviously partisan political study came to be part of the traditionally so much more reliable work of the ADL. In any case, Mr. Foxman, *tu quoque* is the lamest of all forms of argument.

Then there is my "disingenuousness." This is a curious, one might even say unconsciously revealing, choice of words. What I claim to find in the book, says Mr. Foxman, is just not there: "the ADL does not make a case" that the religious Right is anti-Semitic, only that some of its representatives are "insensitiv[e] to Jewish issues." Perhaps if one were ingenuous to a fault, one might think that the labored effort to connect Pat Robertson and Paul Weyrich to the Liberty Lobby—or the lengthy discussion of R. J. Rushdoony and Christian Reconstructionism, in strength of following and influence the equivalent of the old Jewish Freeland League—are intended only to suggest a certain "insensitivity." And perhaps if one were ingenuous to a fault, one would also believe that Mr. Foxman's meeting with leaders of the religious Right proves anything one way or the other.

All this aside, Mr. Foxman does raise one serious point that merits a serious answer: that the ADL has long held positions on school prayer, tuition tax credits, crèches, etc. with which the religious Right passionately disagrees, and that it is important for American democracy that these issues be debated in a civil manner. I do not doubt that, particularly in recent years, some representatives of the Christian conservative community have spoken of the issues surrounding the separation of church and state in a somewhat less than civil manner. But for his part Mr. Foxman should not in all honesty attempt, as he does, to claim that *The Religious Right* is a civil or respectful book. Church-state questions are after all extremely neuralgic for everyone concerned (though since for more than 30 years now the courts have almost invariably decided against Christian conservatives, an extra measure of charity ought in my opinion to be extended in the weighing of their rhetoric). To engage these questions without passion, therefore, is to sink to the level of inane "brotherhood" chat.

Nevertheless, there is a twofold problem with even the serious part of Mr. Foxman's letter. For one thing, if what the ADL intended was a book in defense of its own reading of the First Amendment and not merely a Left-liberal attack on the Right, why were such figures as Phyllis Schlafly, America's most effective anti-feminist, and Father Enrique Rueda, author of a book hostile to the homosexual-rights movement, brought into it? In truth, the ADL permitted itself to be used as a vehicle for a particular brand of politics; and insofar as it claims, and is seen, to be speaking for and defending the interests of the Jewish community, it associates that community with that politics. There is, to put it mildly, nothing Jewish about a commitment to such current liberal social fashions as feminism, abortion, and homosexual rights, but when the major Jewish organizations, particularly the ADL, speak in the name of these fashions, they drag the entire community, willing or unwilling, with them.

And as for ADL's and the liberals' reading of the First Amendment—which is, I will admit, not a mere fashion but a primary article of secular faith—it is time for the Jews to recognize that this is not the 18th or even the 19th century. Understandable as their embrace of the secularists was in days long gone by, the *religion* of secularism—by now as bigoted and unforgiving as in the darkest of the dark ages—is what neither the United States nor the Jews need or can afford. Instead of standing smugly on its record, then, it is time for the ADL to open itself up to a fresh discussion of what was actually intended by church-state separation and how the Jewish community might now save itself from an encroaching debilitation and isolation. Perhaps Mr. Foxman's newfound conservative Christian friends could help him find his way.

On Jerusalem

To the Editor of Commentary:

David Bar-Illan ["Next Year in (a Divided?) Jerusalem," September 1994] attacks me and my views on the future of Jerusalem based on an article of mine that appeared the *Washington Post*. It is legitimate for Mr. Bar-Illan, the editor of the formerly great *Jerusalem Post*, to differ with me (even if he is wrong) and I will not write a diatribe about why I believe he is incorrect. I do, however, wish to correct one major flaw in his article in which he accuses me of lying.

In my article, I claimed that the municipality of Jerusalem has severely discriminated against its Arab population by investing next to nothing in development and services in Arab neighborhoods. In response, Mr. Bar-Illan quotes Teddy Kollek: Jerusalem has spent "no less money on the Arab part of the city than on the Jewish section." He further mentions improvements in electricity, sewage, water, and, of course, the health clinic that was built in the Sheikh Jarah neighborhood—"the largest, most modern clinic in the city," according to Mr. Bar-Illan. Finally, Mr. Bar-Illan calls Teddy Kollek one of "Israel's leading doves."

Now, let us look at the real facts. In August, Amir Cheshin, the outgoing adviser to the mayor on Arab affairs, reminded the public of a "secret" report that had been buried by "leading-dove" Kollek. The report indicated that the municipality had systematically discriminated against the Arab parts of Jerusalem since 1967, offering them less than 10 percent of the budget in all areas, development as well as services.

The most blatant discrimination is in building rights and permits. After all the expropriation of privately-owned Arab lands in East Jerusalem, the Palestinians today still retain 35,000 dunams of vacant land. Despite this, there are some 21,000 homeless Arab families in the city. These people are not living in the streets of Jerusalem. They have doubled and tripled up with their families or they have left the city to find housing outside. They are not allowed to build homes on their own land. On other formerly Arab-owned land in Jerusalem, 27,000 dunams of which the city expropriated from their Arab owners, the municipality and the Israeli government have built more than 70,000 housing units for Jews only. Additionally, because the municipality has never bothered to develop a zoning plan for Arab neighborhoods (could this have been inten-

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tional?), almost all new Arab building is given demolition orders. Demolitions are carried out regularly by the municipality at a rate of more than 50 per year, adding an additional 50-plus families to the homeless list. These demolished homes were all built on privately-owned Arab land.

With regard to services, in 1990 the municipality defined the scope of its actions in East Jerusalem as the "assurance of a reasonable standard of service." The municipality admitted that it could not provide equal services and did in fact maintain a lower standard of services in the East. In 1990, total government and municipal expenditure for the benefit of the Arab population was slightly more than $3 million. In the same year, the Palestinians in East Jerusalem paid $7.5 million in municipal taxes. Moreover, this figure does not take into account income and other taxes paid by Palestinians to the national government which constitutes some five times more than this sum.

The lack of equal services is quite apparent to anyone who walks through any of the eighteen Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem. Where are the public parks and play areas for children? Where are the sidewalks? Why isn't there street lighting at night? Look at the condition of the roads. Walking through the streets of East Jerusalem feels strangely similar to walking through the streets of the Palestinian towns and villages of the West Bank. They all lack the same services.

While it is true that living standards have improved in the Arab sectors of Jerusalem since 1967, it is also true that they improved in Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and many other countries of the region. The Palestinians enjoy a higher standard of living because Israelis, too, enjoy the benefits of economic development. The gap between the two societies, however, has continued to grow over the last fifteen years. With regard to improvements in sewage, one need only wander beyond the regular tourist routes to discover flowing raw sewage through villages and neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. . . .

Under the tutelage of that "leading dove," Teddy Kollek, the city of Jerusalem systematically discriminated against its Arab population while at the same time deceiving the entire world that he was the best man for the job because of his "fairness" to the Arabs. This is the same man who is now busy traveling around the world receiving one peace prize after the other. It is true that Kollek built the health clinic in East Jerusalem. And it is true that it is one of the best in the city. This "pet" project has served Kollek's interests thousands of times over. By building one good health clinic for Arabs, he has duped the entire world (with Mr. Bar-Illan serving as flag-waver) into thinking that there is equality between Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem (or even that Arabs receive preferential treatment). The real truth is blatantly obvious to anyone who visits Arab neighborhoods in the city, though one must wander off the tourist path to do so. The real truth is that there has never been a greater annexationist in Israel than Kollek. He may wear the feathers of a dove, but he has served the cause of the most right-wing of Israeli parties—no wonder Mr. Bar-Illan likes him so much.

When the truth comes out, it is Mr. Bar-Illan who has lied. It is Mr. Bar-Illan who continues to lie to the public and to himself about the myths that Kollek and others have created. The time has come to break those myths. Palestinians will never have equality under Israeli rule. In fact, Palestinians have never even fought for such equality. They do not want to be under Israeli rule. The only way that peace will be achieved in Jerusalem is when we all recognize that Jerusalem today is a divided city. Peace can be achieved when those divisions are recognized by both sides so that, together, we can create real mechanisms for the sharing of Jerusalem. Most Palestinians and most Israelis will come to realize that by sharing Jerusalem we can live together. There will never be peace as long as one side rules the other against its will. And it is time for the mythmakers, such as David Bar-Illan, to wake up and face the true realities.

GERSHON BASKIN
Israeli/Palestine Center for
Research and Information
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

David Bar-Illan laments that Jerusalem may possibly be divided again. I agree that an Arab foothold in that city would create

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another Danzig, and a rationale for a corridor that would split Israel. . . .

At this moment, Yitzhak Rabin is still vacillating. However, the two *eminences grises* of his administration, Shimon Peres and Yossi Beilin, are preparing the ground for such a disaster. . . . Unfortunately, the Peres-Beilin position finds strong support in this country in the major Jewish political organizations that are enmeshed with the peace movement. These organizations would serve Israel better if they could focus in a different direction.

The United States embassy in Israel is still in Tel Aviv. The developments of the last year allow no excuse for not relocating it to Jerusalem. The establishment of full diplomatic relations with the Vatican neutralizes the issue of the internationalization of the city. Congressional approval of the decision to relocate the embassy is a foregone conclusion. . . . The relocation of the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is fully consistent with international law, and now is the right time to do it.

Let us then concentrate our efforts on an appeal to President Clinton to leave Jerusalem an undivided city and show our commitment to that goal by moving the embassy.

Countries that have diplomatic relations with Israel and have not yet located their embassies in Jerusalem are waiting in the wings and will undoubtedly follow the U.S. example.

SAMUEL L. TENNENBAUM
West Orange, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

David Bar-Illan makes passing reference to an annual half-hour meditation permitted Jews on the Temple Mount. . . . The actual situation is much worse. In fact, no open expression of Jewish worship is allowed there. Jews who can be visibly identified as Jews, i.e., knitted skullcaps, *tzizit* fringes, etc., are prevented from entering the compound. The Israeli police have standing orders to stop either individual or group prayers, despite the existence of the 1967 law on the Protection of the Holy Places which specifically guarantees the right of free access and free worship to all religions. And according to those same orders, any group of more than seven Jews is banned. . . .

Israel's Supreme Court judges, sitting as the High Court for Justice, have consistently refused to countermand this policy and, at best, limit the presence of Jews solely to tourist visits. And recently, in a spirit of ecumenicalism, Christians who have attempted to kneel and commune with the special spirituality of the site have also been removed. . . .

YISRAEL MEDAD
Public Council for the
Temple Mount
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

The serious (and frightening) questions David Bar-Illan raises about the future of Jerusalem bring to mind an episode which was an "early-warning" experience for me. Twenty-one years ago I accompanied Joseph P. Sternstein, then-president of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), to an informal meeting with leaders of a national non-Zionist organization. After we had discussed a number of current issues, and as the meeting was about to end, I posed this question: in the event that Israel and the Arab nations reach peaceful solutions to their disputes and the only remaining issue is the status of Jerusalem, would you compromise on Jerusalem as the undivided capital of the state of Israel—for the "sake of peace"? There was no angry outburst; there was no shaking of heads in disbelief at the question itself. There was only dead silence.

If faced with the same question today, how would Jews respond? If Mr. Bar-Illan's assessment of the position of the present Israeli government is correct, the reaction of some twenty years ago may very well represent what many are prepared to do today.

Whether on the Left or Right, most of us still believe that Jerusalem must remain the undivided capital of the sovereign state of Israel. David Bar-Illan has sounded the alarm. Will we listen, will we act, and will we do it now?

PAUL FLACKS
Focus
New York City

DAVID BAR-ILLAN writes:

Behind Gershon Baskin's vulgar invective, which recalls the late Communist Knesset member Toufik Ziad's shouts of "liar, liar" whenever he ran out of arguments, there is one valid point. Tourists do not see the real Arab Jerusalem. Nor do television viewers. Tour groups, like reporters, prefer to see the "politically-correct" Jerusalem, where evidence of "oppression" can be found. What they do not notice is that the largest and most opulent private homes in the entire country, let alone in Jerusalem, belong to Arab Jerusalemites. Their houses are virtually all new, built since the Israeli "occupation."

Of course, there are also a few slum-like areas in Jerusalem. But what Mr. Baskin sees as symptoms of oppression and discrimination are nothing more than pockets of poverty which exist in every city. His selective vision recalls the way the Soviets used to describe American cities: New York was mostly East Harlem; Park Avenue and Broadway were ignored.

Mr. Baskin does not refute the basic facts of my article, nor can he: Jerusalem's Arab population, rapidly depleted under Jordanian rule, has since 1967 grown at a slightly faster rate than the Jewish population. By all possible criteria, living standards have improved dramatically. When Jerusalem was reunited, the gap between conditions in the formerly Jordanian-ruled part and the Israeli part was one of two centuries. A typical example: only 10 percent of the population in the Jordanian sector had running water. The rest were dependent on public wells. Now virtually every home has running water and electricity.

The Arabs in Jerusalem have benefited not only from such health clinics as the one Teddy Kollek built in Sheikh Jarah—an incomparable establishment which treats 1,000 patients a day—but from new schools; community centers like the Spofford Center and Beit David, one of the best in the country; a central Arab library; and sports and other youth facilities.

That construction has not caught up with demand is all too true. The Palestinian Arabs, who obviously do not read Mr. Baskin, flock to "oppressed" Jerusalem in numbers larger than the city can readily absorb. They build without waiting for licenses, and the vast majority of their illegally-built homes are never demolished (which is something the right-wing parties bitterly complain about).

To get an idea of how trustworthy Mr. Baskin's information is, one need go no farther than his statement that there are 21,000

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homeless Arab families in Jerusalem. That is at least 100,000 people, or two-thirds of the total Arab population. Mr. Baskin does admit that they are nowhere to be seen, a disappearing trick many cities in America would undoubtedly like to learn. The reason, says Mr. Baskin, is that they have doubled and tripled up with their families or left the city. But the population movement has been in the other direction, and the doubling and tripling has to do with the rather attractive, if old-fashioned, Arab custom of having an extended family live under one roof. What Mr. Baskin does not mention is that the roof can cover a twenty-room villa.

But perhaps the most remarkable facet of Mr. Baskin's letter is his unbridled attack on Teddy Kollek, who is indeed one of Israel's leading doves. No one has bent over backward to placate the Arabs more assiduously than Kollek. To appreciate his dedication to the cause of equality and amity one must realize that he got Jerusalem Arabs to leap over centuries with virtually no cooperation from the Arabs themselves.

In a recent letter about this problem, he wrote:

> Jerusalem is made up of many minorities, including 40 different Christian denominations, Jews from over 100 ethnic backgrounds, including immigrants from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union. Many of them have complaints about the authorities and the municipality. The main difference between these groups and the Arab minority is that the Arabs never agreed to participate in council elections. We invited the Arab leaders to participate, and we suggested that before every city-council meeting they could rise and proclaim their nonrecognition of Israel's control of all of Jerusalem and of course they could keep their Jordanian citizenship. But the Arabs of East Jerusalem refused to participate in municipal administration and therefore made it very difficult for themselves. We had to rely on our own analysis of the situation in Arab quarters. Despite the great handicap, a great deal of progress was made.

What Kollek is reluctant to state is that there is good reason for this lack of cooperation. By working with the municipal government, Arabs risk the fate of "collaborators."

As my article noted, Mr. Baskin is not alone in advocating the redivision of Jerusalem. But it is instructive to realize that he, and presumably like-minded members of the government, are not thinking only of Jerusalem. "Palestinians do not want to be under Israeli rule," he says. But surely he knows that Israeli Arabs from Knesset MK's to Arafat adviser Ahmed Tibi to teachers in Nazareth consider themselves Palestinians. They reject the term "Israeli Arabs." They are "Palestinians who happen to be Israeli citizens." Should these 750,000 Palestinians, too, be "liberated" from Israeli rule?

I should like to thank Samuel L. Tennenbaum, Yisrael Medad, and Paul Flacks for their kind words. I am particularly grateful to Mr. Medad for expanding on the fact that Jews are prohibited from worshipping on Judaism's holiest site, and for mentioning what I learned only after I wrote my article: that Christians, too, are forbidden to pray on the Temple Mount.

Leonard Bernstein

To the Editor of Commentary:

In "How Good Was Leonard Bernstein?" [October 1994], Terry Teachout relates that Harold Schonberg, the former music critic of the *New York Times*, once said that Leonard Bernstein "could have been the American Offenbach," and he proceeds to conjecture that "this must have enraged a man whose greatest desire in later life was to write an opera about the Holocaust."

Not necessarily. I recall at some point, probably in the period 1955-56—unfortunately, I cannot now pin down the date more definitively—having had a discussion with Bernstein about, *inter alia*, Offenbach. Bernstein surprised and delighted me by saying,

> You know, at the time of my early works for the theater and the ballet, a critic once wrote, "This young man may well become the American Offenbach." And that was probably the greatest compliment I have ever received.

This raises a number of questions. Mr. Teachout does not give us the date of Schonberg's statement. It is possible, of course, that it was much later (when Bernstein was no longer "this young man"), and by that time Bernstein no longer relished the idea of becoming the American Offenbach. But I strongly doubt it. For, being the American Offenbach is in no way incompatible with the other ambitions Bernstein might have had. . . .

Many years ago the *New York Times Magazine* ran an article on Bernstein whose last sentence, as best as I can recall, was that though Bernstein might not be "Gershwin, Horowitz, Toscanini, or"—followed by the name of a "serious" composer which now escapes me: it might have been Copland or Stravinsky—he is "halfway to being all four at once." That backhanded praise may indeed have stung Bernstein, but now that the record is complete, it is, of course, also clear that (if one must speak in such idiotic terms) he certainly got much farther than halfway, at least to being Gershwin or Toscanini.

Stefan Bauer-Mengelberg
New York City

To the Editor of Commentary:

Leonard Bernstein was dying when he gave his last concert—at Tanglewood's Berkshire Music Festival in the summer of 1990. A recording of that concert is available. It includes Beethoven's Seventh Symphony which Bernstein rehearsed in the open, the Saturday morning before the Sunday afternoon performance. . . .

That particular Saturday morning, Bernstein walked in a rather labored manner to the podium. His voice, heard as he would stop the orchestra to provide particular direction, was weak and raspy. . . .

Throughout much of the rehearsal, he remained seated. Then, after halting and some backtracking, he arrived at the fourth movement. Is there strength in music? Those triumphal tones of the last movement of this symphony certainly seemed to provide strength to Bernstein, for at various points the very music seemed to lift him from his seat—but I had no sense that Bernstein was being merely dramatic. No, by this time his physical condition had transcended melodrama, and now, in retrospect, I sense that those triumphal tones and his response indicated, finally, a certain spiritual acceptance *of* Leonard Bernstein. The concert itself received a very favorable review in the *New York Times*. I felt honored to have been in the audience for that open rehearsal, witness to a very special happening. . . .

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Who can say whether Leonard Bernstein's success in one particular aspect of the musical world would have been greater had his focus been narrower. And with all those recordings with his name attached, it would be difficult, indeed, soon to forget him. But most of those recordings will be of music composed by *others*, not Bernstein. And perhaps it is time to wonder, not about the continued reputation of the man called "Lenny"—but about how we could ever have lost sight of the creative genius of Gustav Mahler, whose memory Mr. Teachout says was revived by Bernstein (though perhaps he has overlooked the devotion of Bruno Walter to Mahler). . . .

DAVID R. ZUKERMAN
Bronx, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Terry Teachout is in error in calling Leonard Bernstein "the only American-born performer to have found a secure place in the first tier of such classical-music superstars as . . . [Maria] Callas," because Callas, too, was American-born. While records variously list December 2, 3, or 4 as her exact date of birth, Maria Kalogeropoulos was indisputedly born in 1923 at Flower Hospital on Fifth Avenue in New York City. . . .

HOWARD SCHRANZ
New York City

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

I thank Stefan Bauer-Mengelberg, David R. Zukerman, and Howard Schranz for their interesting letters. Maria Callas was indeed born in New York City, a fact I knew (and have had pointed out to me by several other readers), but which slipped my mind for an obvious (if inexcusable) reason: she was American by birth only. Callas left the United States at the age of fourteen, and her career, tastes, and temperament were in every way the product of European training and experience.

Terrorism

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Martin Kramer's contention ["The Jihad Against the Jews," October 1994] that the greatest threat to Jews today comes from Islamic fundamentalists is well-argued and persuasive. His call on Western governments to stem the influx of Islamic fundamentalists is equally well-taken. Yet how, I wonder, could the U.S. government actually go about this?

On a practical level, the prospect of screening would-be immigrants from the entire Muslim world and successfully filtering out the fundamentalists seems remote, to put it mildly.

On a constitutional level, I am not at all certain that extreme piety and devotion to their religion constitute sufficient cause for denying Muslims entry to the United States. And if it is argued that fundamentalists are closely linked to murder and terror—well (the *New York Times* will surely ask) shall we prevent Orthodox Jews from entering our country because of what Baruch Goldstein did in Hebron?

I conclude, therefore, in agreeing with Mr. Kramer that something urgently needs to be done, yet doubting whether anything effective can be done.

JAINE SHATTAN
Silver Spring, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

It has long troubled me that the reasons given by terrorists for their actions are usually accepted at face value. . . . Actually, both psychology and history tell us that, generally, this is simply not so. . . . Killers, especially those whose acts are premeditated, kill because they want to and, on some important level, because they enjoy doing it. Unless there is proof to the contrary, comparing a murder to a war, a *jihad*, or anything else is, at best, a rationalization. In most acts of terrorism, there is no such proof.

No useful purpose is served by studying . . . Islam to understand the Buenos Aires bombers. Such a study, by the very fact of its being made, can only help legitimize the murderers, in whole or in part. . . .

STEPHEN E. ADLER
New York City

MARTIN KRAMER writes:

Jaine Shattan underestimates the means available to the U.S. government to protect its citizenry. U.S. agencies do collect information on fundamentalists who have threatened U.S. interests. The problem is that this information is

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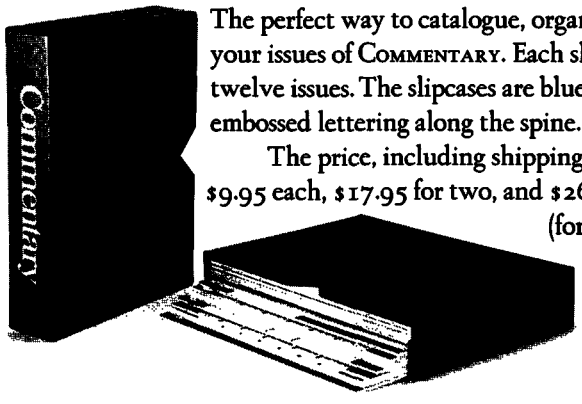

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not always available at the point on the globe where visa decisions are made. The government's own report on how visas were issued to Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, alleged mastermind of the World Trade Center bombing, is a study in bureaucratic ineptitude. Since then, procedures have been tightened. While filtering is not foolproof, an open door is an open invitation to dangerous people whom no other country would admit, and some of whose faces we now have seen in Steven Emerson's compelling TV documentary, *Jihad in America.*

The purpose of such a filtering is not to bar people of piety, Muslim or Jewish. But if "extreme piety" takes the form of sanctifying political violence or threatening the U.S., evidence to that effect should be sufficient to exclude foreign fundamentalists from entry. Such evidence exists in abundance, certainly for the best-known activists of many movements. Where it is absent, information often can be supplied by Middle Eastern governments. It is not only practical to bring all this information to bear on visa decisions; it is essential if America is to enjoy an immunity from fundamentalist violence.

Stephen E. Adler's suggestion that my article "can only help legitimize the murderers" in Buenos Aires is a misreading, to say the least. His claim that such killing is pathological—done to satisfy some homicidal craving—exonerates the killers of any responsibility, on the grounds of insanity. But Buenos Aires was not the act of psychopaths in need of treatment. It was a calculated and cynical attempt to punish Israel by killing Jews. The ideology behind the choice of a Jewish target—a virulent anti-Semitism, imported into Islam—is far more dangerous than any individual psychosis.

There are governments which are soft on terror, and which would like us to believe, like Mr. Adler, that such killing is senseless. After all, no government can be expected to anticipate or deter acts of madness. But governments are perfectly capable of combating and deterring political violence, which the Buenos Aires bombing most certainly was. If terrorists are not held fully accountable for their actions, and governments for their inaction, then truly the victims will have died in vain—and their number will surely multiply.

Learning Math

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

David Guaspari, in his review of *Overcoming Math Anxiety* by Sheila Tobias [Books in Review, October 1994], is of course right to note that Tobias errs in describing Plato's *Republic* as "Socrates' best-known treatise on government" and in identifying it as his *Dialogue,* but he goes overboard in characterizing this error as "a serious cultural failing" and a "howler."

Unless, that is, he is prepared to make the same criticism of Allan Bloom's analysis. At the very outset of the interpretive essay accompanying his translation of the *Republic,* Bloom writes: "The *Republic* is the true *Apology* of Socrates, for only in the *Republic* does he give an adequate treatment of the theme which was forced on him by Athens's accusation against him."

The context of Tobias's reference is a discussion of the Socratic method, suggesting that, properly understood, it provides a model for teaching mathematics. No more than Bloom does she commit a cultural trespass of any kind, let alone a howler, in regarding Plato's *Republic* as a rendering of the teachings of Socrates.

SANFORD LAKOFF
University of California
San Diego, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

David Guaspari's review of the latest version of the great Sheila Tobias ripoff has, at last, rectified for me the wrongs perpetrated by this artist of the trendy and shallow. I suffered the wave of enthusiasm that Tobias engendered at Cornell in the wake of the 60's disasters, and was at that point a tiny and totally ostracized voice of dissent. Thank you.

NADINE F. GEORGE
Gambier, Ohio

DAVID GUASPARI writes:

My clucking over Sheila Tobias's factual howlers—and "howler" is exactly right—was a rhetorical way of dismissing her book's cultural pretensions. Sanford Lakoff says that the specific passage I dismissed, despite its warts, made an important point. Doing so required him to perform an act of charity, by elevating a few banal paragraphs to "a discussion of the Socratic method" and attributing to them the significance they might have had if he or Allan Bloom had rewritten them.

Let me finish by thanking Nadine F. George for her letter.

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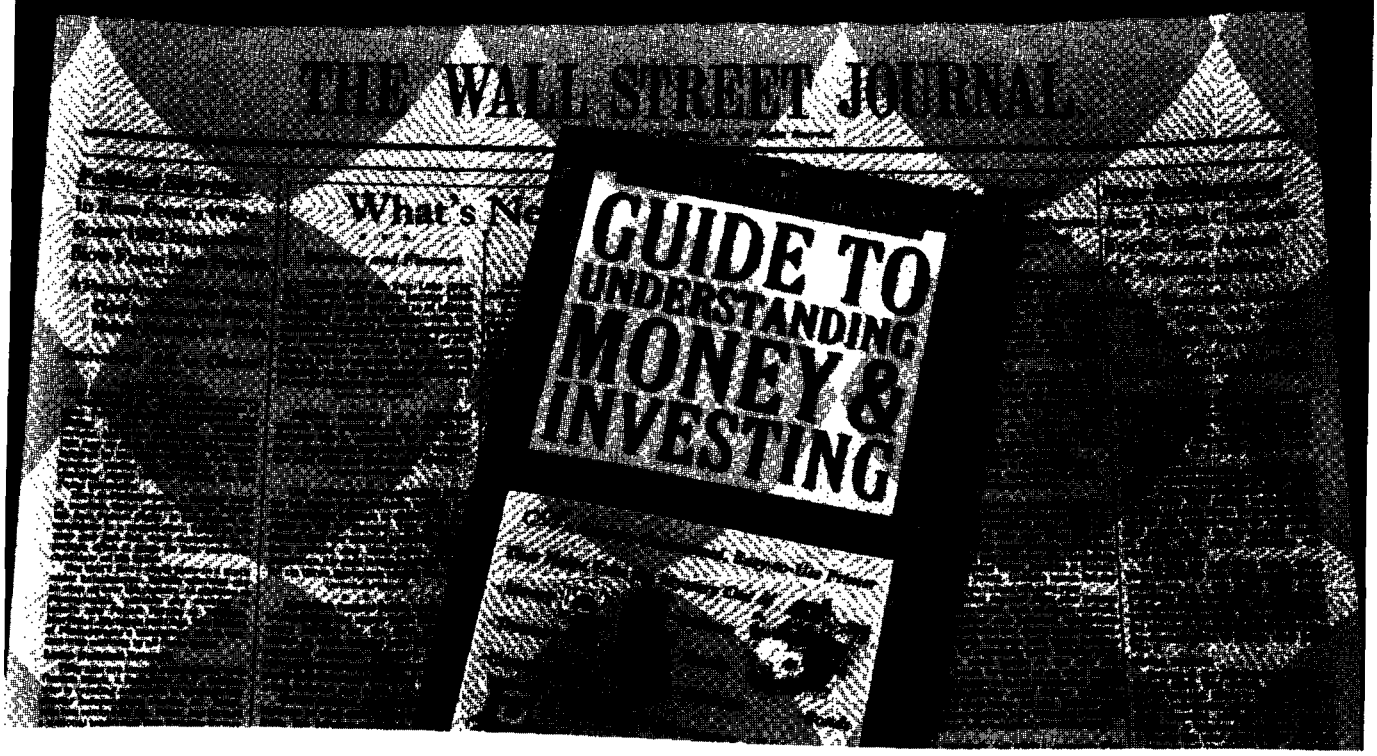

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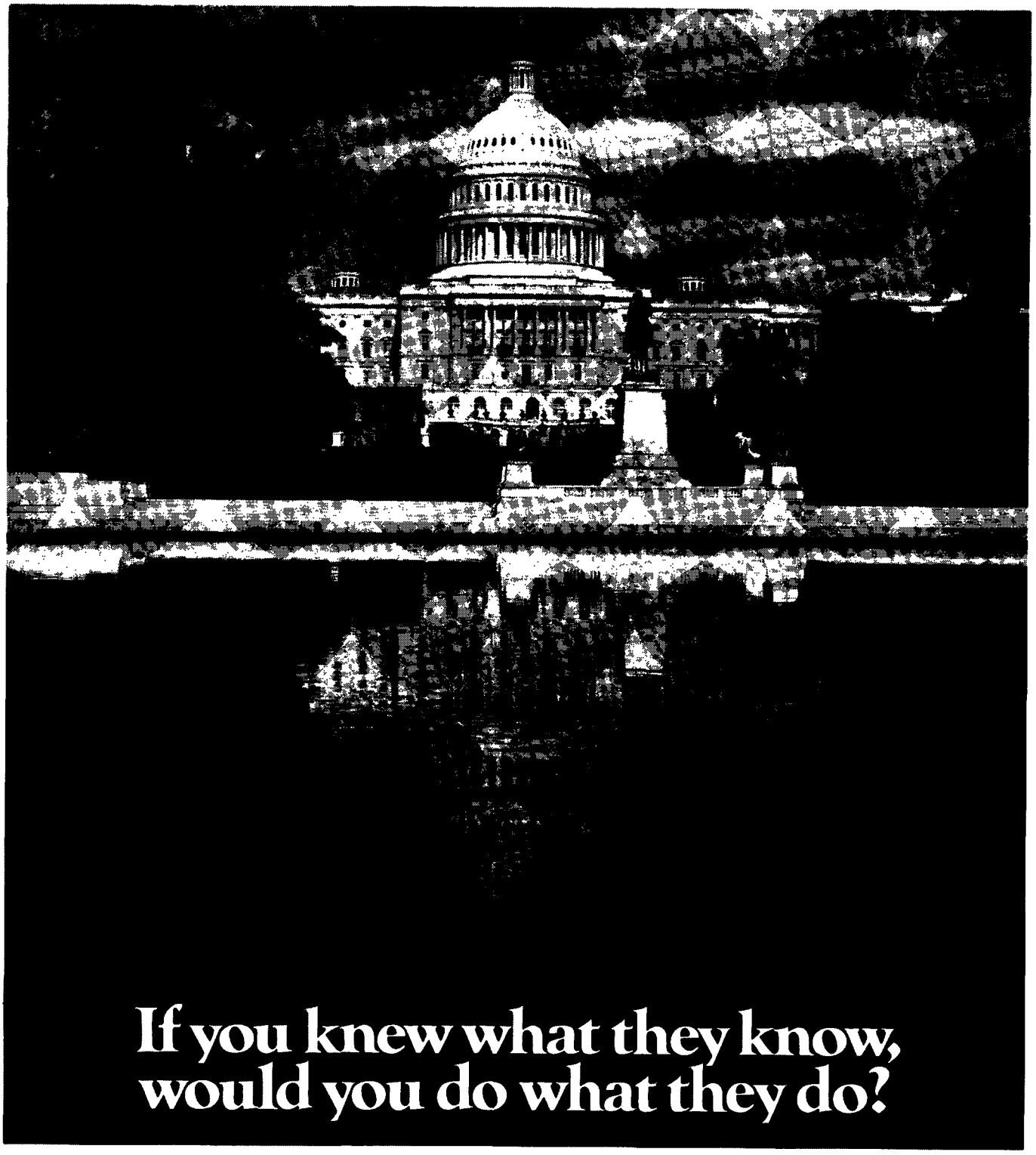

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God and the Americans

Paul Johnson

1. The City Upon a Hill

NO OTHER country in history enables us to examine more closely the interaction among religious belief, culture, and public life than the United States of America. To begin with, this is the first and only instance in which we can watch a major Christian community coming into being by the light of documentary sources. America did not mysteriously emerge in prehistory. Its early evolution was not prescriptive. It was born in the clear light of recorded history and its first Christian inhabitants were only too anxious to explain what they were doing, and why.

In a way, the first American settlers were like the ancient Israelites. They saw themselves as active agents of divine providence. They were a chosen people. It was commonly believed among 16th-century English Protestants, and especially by those connected to the sea—ship captains, explorers, navigators, ocean traders, and adventurers—that the English were not only chosen by God, an elect people, but were given by Him a special mission to spread the Gospel overseas. As one of these nautical ideologues, John Davys, put it:

> There is no doubt but that we of England are this saved people, by the eternal and infallible presence of the Lord predestined to be sent into these Gentiles in the sea, to those isles and famous kingdoms, there to preach to the people of the Lord: for are not we only set upon Mount Zion to give light to all the rest of the world? . . . It is only we, therefore, that must be these shining messengers of the Lord, and none but we.

This same view was put, in more practical terms, by the poet John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's, in his sermon to the shareholders of the Virginia Company, who were proposing to settle America in 1622. He told them that, by their energy and investment, "You shall have made this island, which is but as the suburbs of the old world, [into] a bridge, a gallery to the new; to join all to that world that shall never grow old, the kingdom of heaven." In true biblical style, he assured them: "You shall add persons to this kingdom, and to the kingdom of heaven, and add names to the books of our chronicles, and to the book of life."

In the event, the settlement of America by English Protestants was to be more than this. It was to be the greatest, indeed the only, realized experiment in post-European Christianity. The birth of Protestant America was a deliberate and self-conscious act of church-state perfectionism. For most of the early settlers, especially in New England, were dissenting groups fleeing the Anglican England of James I where, in their view, the Protestant "reformation" had failed. John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company (formed in 1628), made it clear why they were leaving England and going to America:

> All other churches of Europe are brought to desolation, and it cannot be but the like judgment is coming upon us. . . . This land [England] grows weary of its inhabitants, so as man which is the most precious of all creatures, is here more vile and base than the earth they tread upon. . . . We are grown to the height of intemperance in all excess of riot. . . . The fountains of learning and religion are so corrupted . . . that most children, even the best wits and of fairest hopes, are perverted, corrupted, and utterly overthrown by the multitude of evil examples and the licentious government of those seminaries.

Winthrop and his colleagues believed that previous colonies had failed because they were "carnal and not religious." They dismissed with scorn

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PAUL JOHNSON, the eminent British author, has already produced *A History of Christianity* and *A History of the Jews*, and is currently at work on *A History of the American People*. Among his many other books are *Modern Times* and *The Birth of the Modern*; and *The Quotable Paul Johnson*, edited by George J. Marlin, Richard P. Rabatin, and Heather Richardson Higgins, has just been published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. The present essay is based on a series of three lectures he delivered this past October at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, inaugurating the Gilder Lehrman Institute Lectures in American History.

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the Pilgrims who had settled at Plymouth ten years earlier—they were a mere separatist group, looking for a hole to hide in. Winthrop's band of Puritans stayed in the church to reform it from within. They were aggressive and ambitious, a direct challenge to the existing secular and ecclesiastical government.

Winthrop started a diary on Easter Monday 1630 as his ship, the *Arbella*, was off the Isle of Wight in England, and like the ancient Israelites, he noted in it all the signs that God supported the enterprise. In a shipboard sermon to the settlers, he explained that they had entered into a collective covenant with God. They were chosen and exemplary: "For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us."

As the ship neared America, Winthrop excitedly recorded the signs that offered parallels with the Hebrew Bible: "There came a smell off the shore like the smell of a garden. . . . There came a wild pigeon into our ship, and another small land bird." Winthrop was delighted to discover and record that, for 300 miles around the point of settlement, the Indians "are swept away by the smallpox . . . so God hath hereby cleared our title to this place."

IT IS VERY significant that the earliest European inhabitants of what was to become the United States should regard themselves as under the special watch and care of God and, as such, designated to be seen by the rest of the world as performing an apostolic role. This image of the City upon a Hill was in time to become secular—the United States was to become the first model republic, the first mass democracy, the first benign world power, and so on. But in its origins the idea was religious. Here was the opportunity to build the first true Christian commonwealth, in the light of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, in accordance with apostolic example, and in congruence with the signs given by the Lord Himself.

In 1645, Winthrop delivered a speech setting out the ideology of this holy commonwealth and defining the limitation imposed by religion on the liberties of the people. Man, he insisted, had

> a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest. . . . This liberty is maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority, it is the same kind of liberty whereof Christ hath made us free. . . . If you stand for your natural corrupt liberties, and will do what is good in your own eyes, you will not endure the least weight of authority . . . but if you will be satisfied to enjoy such civil and lawful liberties, such as Christ allows you, then you will quietly and cheerfully submit unto that authority which is set over you . . . for your good.

In Winthrop's opinion, therefore, there could be no question of religion being a "private" matter. It was a public matter, because religious belief, society, and state were inseparable. Government was not just a secular institution but a religious one, too. Another architect of America, William Penn, wrote in 1682 in his *Preface to the Frame of Government of Pennsylvania*:

> Government seems to me a part of religion itself, a thing sacred in its institution and end. . . . It crushes the effects of evil and is as such (though lower yet) an emanation of the same divine power that is both author and object of pure religion, government itself being otherwise as capable of kindness, goodness, and charity as a more private society.

It is important, I think, to grasp that these early settlements of English-speaking America were both individual and collective contracts with God to set up a church-state, not just a religious settlement. The earliest, the *Mayflower* Compact of 1620, reads:

> We, whose names are underwritten . . . having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and of one another, covenant and combine ourself together in a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid.

The church was formally constituted in exactly the same manner, as at Salem in 1629:

> We covenant with the Lord and with one another; and do bind ourselves in the presence of God, to walk together in all His ways, according as He is pleased to reveal Himself unto us in His blessed word of truth.

Hence the men who founded the English colonies in America drew no distinction between church and state: both were at one in enabling the City upon a Hill to be built.

But not all men were equal. The system of church government was congregationalist. The settlers were divided into church members and nonmembers. Only those of righteous life and true belief were admitted as members, and their righteousness was determined by the minister of religion. And, initially at least, only church members had legislative powers. The system was approvingly described in 1673 by Urian Oakes, later president of Harvard:

> According to the design of our fathers and the frame of things laid by them, the interests of righteousness in the commonwealth and holiness in the churches are inseparable. . . . To divide what God hath joined . . . is folly in its exaltation. I look upon this as a little model of the glorious kingdom of Christ on earth. Christ reigns among us in the commonwealth as well

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as in the church and hath his glorious interest involved and wrapped up in the good of both societies respectively.

It followed that the civil authority had the right to punish religious offenses as well as what we would call secular ones. In Winthrop's Massachusetts, all, whether freemen or not, had to swear an oath of loyalty to the government and undertake to submit to its authority, whether wielded in religious or in secular matters. The magistrates were officially described as "nursing fathers" (in a reference to Moses' self-description in Numbers); they were to tackle heresy, schism, and disobedience among the adult "children" of the colony, who were to be "restrained and punished by civil authority." And this was exerted in ruthless manner to uphold religious truth and public decorum.

In August 1630, for instance, Governor Winthrop accused and convicted Thomas Morton of Boston of "erecting a maypole and reveling." Morton's house was burned down and he was put in the stocks while awaiting execution of sentence to be shipped back to England. The following June, Winthrop recorded in his journal that Philip Ratcliffe was whipped and had both his ears cut off for "most foul, scandalous invectives against our churches and government." Sir Christopher Gardiner was banished for what was described as "bigamy and papism."

IN THEORY, then, New England might have evolved like Calvin's Geneva into a fierce fundamentalist theocracy, only on a much bigger scale. But there were many reasons why this did not and could not happen.

In the first place, the colonists were too independent-minded, unruly, and divided among themselves to be docile citizens of a theocracy. Governor Winthrop discovered this for himself, being deposed from office, reelected, and deposed again as public opinion shifted.

Indeed, religious disputes, about the precise mechanism whereby men and women were saved, were the first expression of politics in America. Anne Hutchinson held that man could not prepare himself for election as one of God's chosen by good works—rather, God bestows grace on the elect through direct revelation. Winthrop thought this a leveling, anti-intellectual creed which, by denying the effectiveness of practical good works, challenged the discipline of the colony. But Governor Vane, who had succeeded Winthrop in office, agreed with Mrs. Hutchinson's antinomian views. The church in Boston itself was antinomian, the rest orthodox. The first historian of the colony wrote: "It began to be as common here to distinguish between men, by being under a covenant of grace or a covenant of works, as in other countries between Protestants and papists."

The result was the first real contested election on American soil, which took place on May 17, 1637, at a crowded outdoor meeting in Cambridge. "There was great danger of a tumult that day," it was recorded; the antinomians "grew into fierce speeches, and some laid hands on others. But seeing themselves too weak [in numbers] they grew quiet."

In the event, they were defeated by the orthodox party. Governor Winthrop was restored. He promptly expelled Mrs. Hutchinson and others, and had 75 of their supporters disenfranchised and disarmed. He also sent details of his action back to England so that "all our godly friends might not be discouraged from coming to us."

But not even Governor Winthrop thought it possible to prevent colonists who disagreed with his form of orthodoxy from creating their own religious enclaves. The year before Anne Hutchinson was expelled, another dissident, Roger Williams, who took the view that church and state ought to be separated entirely, was secretly warned by Winthrop (then out of office) that a plan was afoot to deport him to England. Winthrop "privately wrote to me," said Williams, to slip off from Salem and "to steer my course to Narrangansett Bay and the Indians, for many high and heavenly public ends, encouraging me, from the freeness of the place from any English claims and patents."

Thus it was that Williams founded Providence, Rhode Island, termed by the orthodox "the sewer of New England." Writing of his new colony, Williams laid down: "I desired it might be a shelter for persons distressed for conscience." In 1644 he published his defense of religious freedom, *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for the Cause of Conscience Discussed*, and his new instrument of government declared that "the form of government established in Providence Plantations is DEMOCRATICAL, that is to say, a government held by the free and voluntary consent of all, or the greater part, of the free inhabitants." Williams listed the various laws and penalties for specific transgressions but added:

> And otherwise than thus, what is herein forbidden, all men may walk as their consciences persuade them, every one in the name of his God. And let the saints of the Most High walk in this colony without molestation, in the name of Jehovah their God, for ever and ever.

This was confirmed by royal charter in 1663:

> No person within the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question, for any differences in opinion in matters of religion, and who do not actually disturb the civil peace of our said colony; but that all . . . may from time to time, and at all times hereafter, freely and fully have and enjoy his and their own

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judgments and consciences, in matters of religious concernments.

This was the first commonwealth to make religious freedom, as opposed to a mere degree of toleration, the principle of its existence, and to make this a reason for separating church and state. Its existence of course opened the doors to the Quakers and the Baptists, and indeed to missionaries from the Congregationalists of the North and the Anglicans of the South.

Hence, in addition to the principles of religious freedom and separation of church and state, Rhode Island introduced the practice of religious competition. In a sense, it became the prototype for the future United States. But it is important to note that, as such—and particularly in its secularism—it was a minority breakaway from the prevailing orthodoxy. And even Williams's secularist doctrine was couched in the phraseology of Christian fundamentalism.

The ease with which Roger Williams broke from orthodoxy to found his own free colony illustrates the central geographical fact of American religious history: the country was too big to enable any form of orthodoxy to triumph—its very vastness made heterodoxy possible.

STRICT Calvinists were not the only believers who felt persecuted in 17th-century England. The Roman Catholics had many more legal disabilities to bear and in 1632 one of them, George Calvert Lord Baltimore, secured a charter from Charles I to found his own colony on their behalf, the future Maryland, called after Charles I's papist wife, Henrietta Maria.

Father Andrew White, who kept the first diary of the settlement, adopted the same providential approach as Governor Winthrop. He too saw his fellow settlers as chosen people under divine dispensation, and Chesapeake Bay as the promised land. "This bay is the most delightful water I ever saw," he enthused. The land was "sweet, firm, and fertile." There were plenty of fish, fine woods of walnuts, oaks, and cedars, "salad-herbs and such-like," strawberries, raspberries, mulberry vines, rich soil, "delicate springs of water," partridge, deer, turkeys, geese, ducks—and delightful squirrels, eagles, and herons—"the place abounds not only with profit but pleasure." Moreover, Maryland, being halfway between the extremes of Virginia and New England, "has a middle temperature between the two and enjoys the advantages, and escapes the evils, of each." Thus God, he concluded, had been generous to his Catholic Englishmen, and had indeed set them up in a land of milk and honey.

However, the Maryland Catholics, though they might feel they were chosen people too, had no intention of repeating the competitive persecutions of the Old World. When in the 1640's the outbreak of civil war in England threatened to involve their colony in religious strife, they deliberately joined forces with persecuted Puritans to reaffirm a policy of toleration. In 1649 they passed a solemn Act Concerning Religion, later known as the Toleration Act, which not only affirmed the right of all Christians to practice their faith in peace but—in a distant adumbration of political correctness—imposed heavy fines on those who jeered at the religion of others by using offensive terms, "such as heretic, schismatic, idolator, puritan, independent, Presbyterian, popish priest, Jesuit, Jesuited papist, roundhead, and separatist."

There were, it is true, limits even to the toleration of the Marylanders: you could also be fined for denying the existence of God, repudiating the Trinity, or blaspheming against Christ, and a Jew might get into trouble (though few did). But the Toleration Act was an amazing document for its time, since it laid down that henceforth no Christian "would be any ways troubled, molested, or discountenanced for or in respect of his or her religion nor in the free exercise thereto"; and no man or woman could be "any way compelled to the belief or exercise of any other religion against his or her consent."

Of course, all was not clear sailing. The principles of freedom and toleration have always had to be fought for not once but again and again, even in America. Maryland fell first into the hands of Puritan extremists, then came under the sway of Anglican bigots, who made acceptance of Anglican oaths a prerequisite for office, so that Catholic descendants of the original settlers had to convert in order to sit in the assembly. But Anglican rule was superficial, especially in Baltimore which for much of the 18th century was the fastest-growing city in America, with Christians of all denominations—and many sects way beyond any customary definition of Christianity, as well as Jews—practicing their religion freely.

Again, the principle of vastness enabled the Quakers, who were fiercely persecuted in parts of New England—it was customary to strip their women to find marks of witchcraft—and were sometimes bullied even in Maryland, to found their own colony in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania has sometimes been called the key colony in American history. It was the last great flowering of Puritan political innovation. At its heart was the City of Brotherly Love. The harbor of Philadelphia led to Pittsburgh at the gateway to the Ohio Valley and the West, and astride the valleys to the back-country of the South, so that it was the national crossroads. Hence it became, simultaneously, the center of Quaker influence throughout the world, a stronghold of Presbyterianism, the headquarters in America of the Baptists, an Anglican center, a place where many important German religious sects—Moravians, Mennonites, Lutherans, Ger-

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man Reformed, etc.—established their headquarters, and yet a place where large numbers of Catholics and Jews were tolerated.

Pennsylvania was also the home of the first African Methodist Episcopal Church, the earliest independent black body in America, as well as an area where deists, the earliest Unitarians, and even humanists could feel safe and at home. Philadelphia was the seat of the American Philosophical Society and, granted its religious and nonreligious composition, it is no accident that it was the city which gave birth to the libertarian and separatist principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.

But in addition to being contentious and vast, there was a third reason why America evolved into a multireligious society. Most of all, it was, in the deepest sense, nonclerical. This was the real reason why it could never have become a theocracy—the clergy never had the power to impose one.

Right from the start, and even in New England, America gave the clergy themselves less actual authority than they enjoyed under any other government in the Western world at the time. The minister's power lay in determining church membership—and stopped there. The churches were always managed by laymen. Hence the religious establishment, such as it was, was popular, not hieratic. This was the foundation of the distinctive American religious tradition. There was never any sense of division in law between laymen and clerics, between those with spiritual privileges and those without—no jealous juxtaposition, and therefore no confrontation, of a secular with an ecclesiastical world.

In other words, America was born Protestant and did not have to become so through revolt and struggle. It was not built on the remains of an all-embracing Catholic church, or a Protestant establishment. It had no clericalism or anticlericalism.

In all these respects America differed profoundly from the European world which had been shaped by the principles of St. Augustine, who had set down "Compel them to come in" as the totalitarian principle of a compulsory and inclusive Christian society. America, by contrast, had a traditionless tradition, starting afresh with a set of biblical principles, taken for granted, regarded as self-evident, as the basis for a common national creed.

These assumptions inevitably became more moral than doctrinal as the American colonies expanded and enriched themselves with more human raw material from Europe. Economic factors reinforced the drift toward diversity, religious liberty, and the noninterference of the state in religious matters. The later waves of immigrants had not, for the most part, experienced "conversion" and "saving grace." They tended, increasingly, to be a mere cross section of ordinary Englishmen (and later of Ulstermen and Scottish Presbyterians).

Even in New England this fact of life had to be accommodated. In 1662 its synod declared that baptism was sufficient for church membership (not for full communion). This was denounced as a "Half-Way Covenant" by the elect, the beginning of the end of a "pure" church—and calamitous Indian attacks were interpreted as a sign of divine displeasure.

In 1679 it was decided to make "a full inquiry . . . into the cause and state of God's controversy with us." A "Reforming Synod" was set up and reported: "That God hath a controversy with His New England people is undeniable, the Lord having written His displeasure in dismal characters against us." A new covenant was produced; but historical events moved against the elect. The triumph of Anglicanism in England weakened Calvinism across the Atlantic, not least by imposing a franchise based on property rather than on church membership. And Puritan church leadership was discredited by the witchcraft mania at Salem in 1692, and weakened by the powerful backlash of public remorse that followed it.

Then, too, the merchant element of Boston, who loathed the strict interpretation of Scripture, especially the commercial restrictions derived from the Pentateuch, published in 1699 a manifesto "on broad and catholic" lines, which accorded full status to any who simply professed Christian belief.

In 1702 Cotton Mather, spokesman for the old elect, published his *Magnalia Christi Americana*, documenting "Christ's great deeds in America," and felt he was bound to conclude: "*Religion* brought forth *prosperity*, and the *daughter* destroyed the *mother*. . . . There is danger lest the *enchantments* of this world make them forget *their errand into the wilderness*." But by this time the wilderness had become an increasingly rich country, and the original Calvinist monopoly of New England had gone for good. The liberal elements captured Harvard in 1707 and founded Yale at New Haven nine years later.

Yet the collapse of the idea of a total Christian society in America did not lead to secularism. In America as a whole, religion continued to be the dynamic of society and history. The difference was that Christianity now became a voluntary movement, or series of movements, rather than a compulsory framework. And it was these movements which determined the shape of America's constitutional and social development.

Here we come to the most important point of all. The multiplicity of America's religious struc-

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ture, and the continuance of the millenarian ideal, gave religious revivalism the opportunity to act as a unifying, national force. The revival known as the Great Awakening, which began in 1719 and continued for the next quarter-century and more, was the formative event in the history of the United States, preceding the movement for independence and making it possible.

The Great Awakening crossed all religious and sectarian boundaries, made light of them indeed, and turned what had been a series of European-style churches into American ones. It would almost be true to say that it created an ecumenical American type of religiosity which affected all groups: certainly it gave a distinctive American flavor to a wide range of denominations. This might be summarized under the following heads: evangelical vigor; a tendency to downgrade the clergy; little stress on liturgical correctness, or on parish boundaries; and above all an emphasis on individual spiritual experience. Its key text was Revelations 21:5, "Behold, I make all things new," which was also the text for the American phenomenon as a whole.

The Great Awakening was a much more complicated phenomenon than similar European movements such as John Wesley's revival in England, since it combined rumbustious and unsophisticated mass evangelism with the ideas of the 18th-century Enlightenment. Revivals on both sides of the Atlantic shared a distrust of doctrine, a stress on morality and ethics as opposed to dogma, an ecumenical spirit. The Awakeners agreed with Wesley when he declared: "I . . . refuse to be distinguished from other men by any but the common principles of Christianity. . . . Does thou love and fear God? It is enough! I give thee the right hand of fellowship!" But Jonathan Edwards, the most influential of the Great Awakeners, was also in the mainstream of the intellectual tradition of Erasmus. He stressed reason and natural law, rather than theological distinctions, as the guide to Christian belief and conduct.

Edwards said he read John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* with more pleasure "than the most greedy miser finds when gathering up handfuls of silver and gold from some newly-discovered treasure." But he brought to Locke's presentation of the case for reasonable Christianity the warmth and emotionalism it lacked. That might be termed providential. Locke was writing after a successful revolution—the Glorious Revolution of 1688—and Edwards before one, at a time when unifying and energizing emotions were needed to create a popular will for change.

Much of Edwards's writing seems to strike political as well as theological notes. He sought in his preaching to arouse what he called "affections," which he defined as "that which moves a person from neutrality or mere assent and inclines his heart to possess or reject something." This was the message of his widely-read book, *A Treatise Concerning Human Affections* (1746), where Edwards argued strongly that the deeds of men were caused by God's will. There was thus no essential difference between a religious and a political emotion—both were God-directed. A man was born again not just as an active Christian but as an active libertarian and republican.

Rationalist Edwards might be, but he was also a millenarian. He wrote that in human history, "all the changes are brought to pass . . . to prepare the way for the glorious issue of things that shall be when truth and righteousness shall finally prevail." Men must know the hour when God "shall take the kingdom," and he looked toward "the dawn of that glorious day." In his last work on original sin (1758), he prophesied that there was no reason why God "may not establish a constitution whereby the natural posterity of Adam, proceeding from him, much as the buds or the branches from the stock or root of a tree, should be treated as *one* with him."

It was against this exciting eschatological background that the Great Awakening took off, being reanimated whenever it showed signs of flagging by the advent of new and spectacular orators, such as Wesley's friend George Whitefield, known as "the Grand Itinerant." He seems to have had the gift of tongues—German converts said they could get his message even though they understood little or no English. He preached, as he put it, "with much Flame, Clearness, and Power. . . . Dagon falls daily before the Ark." When he left Boston, he was succeeded by a native evangelist, Gilbert Tennent, who caused a jealous Anglican to record bitterly: "People wallowed in snow, night and day, for the benefit of his beastly brayings."

Another Awakener who helped to "blow up the divine fire lately kindled" was John Davenport of Yale, who was arrested and judged mentally disturbed at one point when he called for articles of luxury such as wigs, cloaks, and rings, as well as many books on religion, to be thrown into the fire. It was the beginning of American personal evangelism, which continues to this day. Not everyone liked it, then as now. Its roots were in the country areas, where it helped to democratize society and aroused opposition to the restrictions of royal government. But it also took fire in the towns, where hearers fainted, wept, shrieked, and generally gave vent to their "affections"—almost exactly as they do at the more extreme kind of popular revivalist services today. The noises, trances, and contortions, so far as we can see, were identical.

It was the marriage between the rationalism of the American elites touched by the 18th-century Enlightenment and the spirit of the Great Awak-

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ening among the masses which enabled the popular enthusiasm thus aroused to be channeled into the political aims of the Revolution—itself soon identified as the coming eschatological event. Neither force could have succeeded without the other.

Nor is the American Revolution conceivable without the religious background. The difference between the American Revolution and the French Revolution is that the American Revolution, in its origins, was a religious event, whereas the French Revolution was an antireligious event. As John Adams was to put it long afterward, in 1818: "The Revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people: and change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations."

We must remember that until the mid-18th century at least, America was a collection of disparate colonies with little contact with one another and often (as in all Latin America then and later) having more powerful links with cities and economic interests in Europe than with neighboring colonies. Religious evangelism was the first continental force, an all-American phenomenon which transcended colonial differences, introduced truly national figures, and made colonial boundaries seem unimportant. Whitefield was the first "American" public figure to be well-known from New Hampshire to Georgia. When he died in 1770, there was comment from the entire colonial press. Thus the form of ecumenicalism based on religious enthusiasm preceded, and shaped, political unity.

Of course religious unity was not complete. The British authorities were encouraged to resist demands for change, and later for independence, by the existence of a powerful loyalist sentiment which, they fondly believed, represented majority opinion. This centered around the Anglican church. Their clergy, and especially their missionary clergy, hated the Great Awakening, and tried hard and with some success to isolate their congregations from it. They likewise hated the Revolution which it bred. A leading New York City Anglican, Charles Inglis, called the rising "the most causeless, unprovoked, and unnatural [rebellion] that ever disgraced any country."

Numerically, Anglicanism was not at all negligible. It had 406 churches. But the Congregationalists had 749 and the Presbyterians 495. Culturally, these two groups were dominant. They were separated chiefly by their forms of church governance and their areas of settlement. But they saw eye to eye on most things, especially the question of political independence, and they worked closely together when they wanted. If you include the Congregationalists with the Presbyterians, then King George III's remark that the American Revolution was essentially "a Presbyterian rebellion" makes a lot of sense.

To be sure, they were joined by other groups. The Dutch and the German sects felt no loyalty to the English crown and it posed no crisis of conscience to them to resist authority—so they rebelled. The Catholics, too, felt no loyalty to the House of Hanover, which maintained a penal regime against their coreligionists in England. The Baptists and the Methodists, who had expanded rapidly during the Great Awakening, joined the rebel armies in vast numbers. The Quakers would not exactly fight, but Benjamin Franklin persuaded them and other pacifists to serve as a kind of civil-defense force. The Anglicans were the hard core of loyalism—and there were not enough of them.

So American freedom and independence were brought about essentially by a religious coalition, which provided the rank and file of a movement led by a more narrowly based elite of Enlightenment men. John Adams, who had lost his original religious faith, nonetheless recognized the essential role played by religion in unifying the majority of the people behind the independence movement and giving them common beliefs and aims:

> One great advantage of the Christian religion is that it brings the great principle of the law of nature and nations, love your neighbor as yourself, and do to others as you would have that others should do to you—to the knowledge, belief, and veneration of the whole people. Children, servants, women, and men are all professors in the science of public as well as private morality. . . . The duties and rights of the man and the citizen are thus taught from early infancy.

What in effect John Adams was implying, albeit he was a secularist and a nonchurchman, was that the form of Christianity which had developed in America was a kind of ecumenical and unofficial state religion, a religion suited by its nature, not by any legal claims, to be given recognition by the republic because it was itself the civil and moral creed of republicanism.

Hence, though the Constitution and the Bill of Rights made no provision for a state church—quite the contrary—there was an implied and unchallenged understanding that America was a religious country, that the republic was religious not necessarily in its forms but in its bones, that it was inconceivable that it could have come into existence, or could continue and flourish, without an overriding religious sentiment pervading every nook and cranny of its society. This religious sentiment was based on the Scriptures and the Decalogue, was embodied in the moral consensus of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and manifested itself in countless forms of mainly Christian worship.

Since American religion was a collection of

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faiths, coexisting in mutual tolerance, there was no alternative but to create a secular state entirely separated from any church. But there was an unspoken understanding that, in an emotional sense, the republic was not secular. It was still the City upon a Hill, watched over and safeguarded by divine providence, and constituting a beacon of enlightenment and an exemplar of conduct for the rest of the world.

This is what President Washington clearly intended to convey in the key passage of his farewell address of 1796. Though he was careful to observe the constitutional and secularist forms, the underlying emotion was plainly religious in inspiration. He implied, indeed, that the voice of the American people was a providential one, and that in sustaining him both as their general and their first President, and enabling the republic to be born and to survive and flourish, it had been giving expression to a providential plan:

> Profoundly penetrated by this idea, I shall carry it with me to my grave, as a strong incitement to unceasing vows that heaven may continue to you the choicest token of its beneficence—that your union and brotherly affection may be perpetual—that the free Constitution, which is the work of your hands, may be sacredly maintained—that its administration in every department may be stamped with wisdom and virtue—that in fine the happiness of the people of these states, under the auspices of liberty, [may be preserved] by so careful a preservation and so prudent a use of this blessing, as will acquire to them the glory of recommending it to the applause, the affection, and adoption of every nation, which is yet a stranger to it.

In Washington's world view, then, the city was still upon a hill, the new nation was still elect, its creation and mission were providential, or as he put it, "sacredly maintained," under heaven, the recipient of a unique "blessing" in the historical plan of the deity for humanity. That is not so far from Governor Winthrop's view, though so much had happened in the meantime; and it would continue to be the view of the American majority for the next century and a half.

2. The Moral Theology of the Melting Pot

Alexis de Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America*, published in 1835, said that the first thing which struck him in the United States was the attitude of, and toward, the churches. At first he found it almost incredible:

> In France I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom pursuing courses diametrically opposed to each other: but in America I found that they were intimately united, and that they reigned in common over the same country.

He added: "Religion . . . must be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions of [the United States]; for if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of free institutions." And Americans, he concluded, held religion "to be indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions."

Many Americans of religious bent saw American religion as much more than this, much more than a merely defensive force. It was progressive. In the century after the Great Awakening, the two formative sects of American Protestantism, Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, ceased to be dominant, and—in numbers, at any rate—the Wesleyans and the Baptists took over.

In New England, under the impact of the Enlightenment, many well-educated Presbyterians became Unitarians, and it was the Unitarians of New England who created the so-called American Renaissance, centered around the *North American Review* (1815) and the *Christian Examiner* (1824). These were periodicals whose editors included William Emerson (the father of the poet and essayist), Richard Henry Dana, James Russell Lowell, Henry Adams, and Edward Everett Hale. Harvard—with a staff including John Quincy Adams, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Lowell, and Oliver Wendell Holmes—was Unitarian in spirit.

Unitarianism was to a great extent the religion of the elite, critics joking that its preaching was limited to "the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of Man, and the neighborhood of Boston." Actually, it traced its pedigree not so much to the Pilgrim Fathers as to Erasmus himself, who saw true Christianity in full alliance with the Renaissance. William Ellery Channing summed up this argument for progressive religion:

> Christianity . . . should come forth from the darkness and corruption of the past in its own celestial splendor and in its divine simplicity. It should be comprehended as having but one purpose, the perfection of human nature, the elevation of men into nobler beings.

In this progressive, religious process, the prime instrument was the American republic itself. That was what Jonathan Edwards had predicted in 1740:

> It is not unlikely that this work of God's spirit, that is so extraordinary and wonderful, is the dawning or at least the prelude of that glorious work of God so often foretold in Scripture,

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which in the progress and issue of it shall renew the world of mankind. . . . And there are many things which make it probable that this work will begin in America.

To the Unitarian elite it was obvious that the work had already begun. In fact, the old Calvinist theory of the elect nation infused American patriotism in the 19th century. As Longfellow put it:

Sail on, O Union, strong and great!
Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate.

WITHIN the framework of this 19th-century version of the chosen people, or what was termed "the favoring providence" at work by using America as its "melting pot"—a new nation being mingled and molded from the debris of the old—American Christianity and the republic it infused acquired their modern characteristics.

America's most typical churches tended to look back from the 19th century straight to the New Testament, dismissing the totalitarianism of the Middle Ages and the age of religious wars as nightmares which had little to do with true religion. They refused to associate Christianity with compulsion in any form. The assumption of the voluntary principle, the central tenet of American Christianity, was that the personal religious convictions of individuals, freely gathered in churches and acting in voluntary associations, would gradually and necessarily permeate society by persuasion and example. Thus the world was seen primarily in moral terms.

This became a dominant factor whether America was rejecting the Old World and seeking to quarantine itself from it—a concept epitomized by the Monroe Doctrine and invoked as recently as during the Cuban missile crisis—or whether America was embracing the world and seeking to reform it. It was characteristic of the American state first to reject espionage on moral grounds, then to undertake it through the Central Intelligence Agency, a moralistic institution which perhaps had less in common with its Soviet equivalent than with St. Ignatius of Loyola's Society of Jesus.

In American religion, the reflective aspect of Christianity was subordinated, almost eclipsed. The old medieval emphasis on the perfection of God, and of man's mere contemplation of Him, was replaced by the idea of God as an exacting and active sovereign, and man's energetic service in His employment. It was not the Christian's duty to accept the world as he found it but to seek to make it better, using all the abundant means God had placed at his disposal. There was little mysticism, little sacramentalism or awe before the holy. There was no place for tragedy, dismissed as an avoidable accident, and its consequences as remediable.

American religion, in its formative period, owed nothing to writers like Pascal. For essential purposes it had no detailed theology at all. All agreed that theological matters were points on which various religions and sects happened to differ. This aspect of religion was important to individuals but not to society and the nation, since what mattered to them was the deep Christian consensus on ethics and morality. So long as Americans agreed on morals, theology could take care of itself. Morals became the heart of religion, whether for Puritans or revivalists, orthodox or liberal, fundamentalist or moralist—the eccentric hot-gospeler at the street corner shared in this consensus as wholeheartedly as the Episcopalian prelate.

Moreover, this was a consensus which even non-Christians, deists, and rationalists could share. Non-Christianity, preeminently including Judaism, could thus be accommodated within the national framework of American Christianity. It could even accommodate Roman Catholicism. Both American Catholicism and American Judaism became heavily influenced by the moral assumptions of American Protestantism, because both accepted its premise that religion (meaning morality) was essential to democratic institutions.

NOW here we arrive at a crucial stage in the development of American Christianity. In most earlier Christian societies, education had been a monopoly of the clergy, and in America, too, the Pilgrim Fathers saw education and faith as inseparable. Communal schools were established in Boston as early as 1635, and in 1647 the Massachusetts General Court passed a law requiring towns within its jurisdiction to set up public schools. Harvard had been founded eleven years earlier.

These institutions were run entirely by religious bodies, were instruments of the church, and were designed to serve religion. The pattern varied but the principle was the same throughout the early states. Virginia set up in 1661 the future College of William and Mary in these terms:

Whereas the want of able and faithful ministers deprives us of those great blessings and mercies that always attend upon the service of God, be it enacted that for the advance of learning, education of youth, supply of the ministry, and promotion of piety, there be land taken up or purchased for a college and free school.

This tendency was reinforced during the 18th-century Great Awakening.

However, at about the same time, American Christian rationalists were making their own contribution. Benjamin Franklin's *Proposal Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* (1749) put forward a scheme to treat religion as one subject in the curriculum and relate it to charac-

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ter-training. Similar theories were advanced by Jonathan Edwards when president of Princeton. This was the solution adopted when the modern American public-school movement, directed by Horace Mann, came into existence in the 19th century. The state took over financial responsibility for the education of the new millions by absorbing all primary and secondary schools, but not (after the Dartmouth Decision of 1819) higher education, where independent colleges survived side by side with state universities.

Thus the true American public school was nonsectarian from the very beginning. But it was not nonreligious. Mann thought that religious instruction should be taken "to the extremist verge to which it can be carried without invading those rights of conscience which are established by the laws of God, and guaranteed by the constitution of the state."

What the schools got was not so much nondenominational religion as a kind of generalized Protestantism based on the Bible. As Mann wrote in his final report:

> That our public schools are not theological seminaries is admitted. . . . But our system earnestly inculcates all Christian morals; it founds its morals on the basis of religion; it welcomes the religion of the Bible; it allows it to do what it is allowed to do in no other system, *to speak for itself.*

Hence in the American system, the school supplied Christian "character-building" and the parent at home topped it off with sectarian trimmings.

There were disadvantages in this system. The Reverend F.A. Newton expressed one of them on behalf of some Episcopalians:

> A book upon politics, morals, or religion, containing no party or sectarian views, will be apt to contain no distinctive views of any kind, and will be likely to leave the mind in a state of doubt or skepticism, much more to be deplored than any sectarian bias.

Another objection, as America increasingly took on the characteristics of a secular state—which it had been by definition from the start—and as it accepted millions of immigrant Catholics, Jews, and other non-Protestants, was the association of moral character-building in the schools with specifically Protestant labels. Therefore, gradually, and particularly in the cities, religion as such was eased out of the schools. The Presbyterian leader Samuel T. Spear put it thus in 1870:

> The state, being democratic in its Constitution, and consequently having no religion to which it does or can give any legal sanction, should not and cannot, except by manifest inconsistency, introduce either religious or irreligious teaching into a system of popular education which it authorizes, enforces, and for the support of which it taxes all the people in common.

But something had to supply the cultural machinery by which the immigrant millions were turned into Americans; and, Spear added, the schools had to have some spiritual foundation. Since the state was not Christian but republican, republicanism should constitute that foundation. The solution was neat because in effect republicanism was itself based upon the old Protestant moral and ethical consensus, which was what the schools already taught—the two concepts stood or fell together. So in this manner the American way of life began to function as the operative creed of the public schools and it was gradually accepted as the official philosophy of American state education.

Horace M. Kallen, writing in July 1951 in the *Saturday Review* under the title "Democracy's True Religion," summarized the theory: "For the communicants of the democratic faith, it is the religion *of* and *for* religion. For being the religion of religions, all may freely come together in it." When in 1952 J. Paul Williams published *What Americans Believe and How They Worship*, he spelled out the ideology in more detail:

> Americans must come to look upon the democratic ideal . . . as the Will of God, or, if they please, of Nature. . . . Americans must be brought to the conviction that democracy is the very Law of Life . . . government agencies must teach the democratic idea as *religion*. . . . Primary responsibility for teaching democracy might be given to the public school. . . . The churches deal effectively with but half the population, the government deals with all the population. . . . It is a misconception to equate separation of church and state with separation of religion and state.

It was on the basis of such assumptions, imperfectly carried out though they might be, that the two great non-Protestant religions of America, the Catholic and the Jewish, became to some extent Protestantized, thereby aligning the political ideals and practices of the United States with a broad-based form of Christianity.

The system could work granted two preconditions. The first was what might be termed a high level of religiosity in the nation. Religious enthusiasm must be continually replenished to make the ethical and moral ideology seem important. This was supplied by the American system of creedal plurality. Having abandoned the advantages of unity, the Americans sensibly turned to exploiting the advantages of diversity—and these proved to be considerable. It was the very competitiveness of rival religions in the United States, acting by analogy to the free-enterprise system, which kept the demands of the spiritual life con-

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stantly before the people, producing an atmosphere of perpetual revival.

This was especially true along the expanding frontier and in the areas of 19th-century settlement. The second Great Awakening, starting in the 1790's, continued until the middle decades of the 19th century. The Wesleyans and Baptists spawned multitudes of cults and subcults, and the camp meeting became, for several decades, the characteristic form of American religious experiment.

There was nothing exactly new in this form of religious enthusiasm. In the time of the ancient Israelites, prophets and other God-exalted preachers had led multitudes into the wilderness for instruction and worship. The apostles themselves had first learned to "speak with tongues" at the time of Pentecost. The camp meeting reproduced the goings-on of the 2nd-century Montanists. But it was only in America that this type of religious performance involved literally millions of believers and became a permanent part of the national religious heritage.

A GREAT and typical meeting was held at Cane Ridge in Kentucky in August 1801. The Presbyterian pastor who organized it, Barton Stone, left a description of what happened. What is interesting about these exercises, as he calls them, of the "saved," is that they had already taken place, in an identical manner, during the first Great Awakening 70 years before, and can still be witnessed, at meetings of American charismatics today, nearly 200 years later.

For instance, there was the falling exercise: "The subject of this exercise would, generally with a piercing scream, fall like a log on the floor, earth or mud, and appear as if dead." Then there were the jerks: "When the head alone was affected, it would be jerked backward and forward, or from side to side, so quickly that the features of the face could not be distinguished." This led to the barking exercise: "A person affected by the jerk would often make a grunt or bark from the suddenness of the jerk." Then there was the dancing exercise, or solo automative dancing, while "the smile of heaven shone in the countenance of the subject." The laughing exercise produced "loud, hearty laughter. . . . The subject appeared rapturously solemn, and his laughter excited solemnity in saints and sinners. It is truly indescribable." Then there was a running exercise and a singing exercise, "not from the mouth or nose but entirely in the breast, the sounds issuing from thence—such music silenced everything."

In Europe, sects which practiced such antics had always been closely watched by the authorities, ecclesiastical and secular, and sometimes harassed, dispersed, and persecuted. In America they were allowed to manifest themselves, for the first time in history, virtually without supervision by the state or by a state church.

There were hundreds of such politico-religious communities in 19th-century America. As Emerson wrote to Thomas Carlyle in 1840: "We are all a little wild here with numberless projects of social reform. Not a reading man but has a draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket."

One of the most rational such communities was Brook Farm in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, founded by a Boston Unitarian, George Ripley. It included the novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne on its agriculture committee, produced books, pottery, and furniture as well as its own food supplies, and ended in bankruptcy. (Hawthorne later lampooned the community in *The Blithedale Romance.*)

Many Central and East European sects also established themselves successfully, and some still flourish today. Others mutated. A German pietist group settled at Harmony, Pennsylvania, in 1804, practiced confession, opposed procreation and marriage, and dogmatized itself out of existence. Another, the Oneida Community of New York State, combined socialism with free love and brought up its children communally in a sort of kibbutz, but stumbled on a method of making steel traps, eventually becoming a successful Canadian corporation and losing its faith.

Other sects became gnostic—that is, they claimed to have discovered secret codes, texts, or systems of knowledge which provided keys to salvation. They tended to part company with Christianity since they replaced the Scriptures with arcane documents of their own.

In about 1827, for example, Joseph Smith, Jr. was given by the angel Moroni a new bible in the form of golden plates inscribed in "reformed Egyptian" hieroglyphics with a set of seer-stones, called by the biblical name Urim and Thummim, with which to read them. The Book of Mormon, as Smith translated it, was put on sale in 1830, after which the angel removed the plates. Smith was "providentially" murdered by a mob in Illinois in 1844, after which Brigham Young was able to take the sect on a great exodus to Salt Lake City in 1847.

Under the First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . . ," sects did not become unlawful if they merely offended Christian dogma. But Christian morals and social customs—and their expression in common and statutory law—were a different matter, and Mormonism was in continual battle with the state until it renounced polygamy in 1890.

Gnosticism was thus perfectly acceptable within the American voluntary Christian society, but only provided that it genuflected to bedrock Christian morality, in which monogamous marriage was a central axiom.

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It was subject to a similar qualification that Catholicism was tolerated. It was not so much forced to change itself as to develop a highly defensive posture, which to some extent came to the same thing.

To many Protestants, a number of Catholic institutions infringed the moral consensus in spirit, even if they did not actually defy it legally, as Mormon polygamy did. One example was convents of nuns, the object of a campaign by the *Protestant Vindicator*, founded in 1834.

In that same year a Boston Protestant mob burned down an Ursuline convent and those responsible were acquitted—Protestant juries seem to have swallowed the rumor that Catholic convents were subterranean dungeons for the murder and burial of illegitimate children conceived by the lascivious nuns.

The next year saw the publication in Boston of *Six Months in a Convent*, and in 1836 *Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery in Montreal*, written by a group of New York anti-Catholics. This was followed by *Further Disclosures* and *The Escape of Sister Frances Patrick, Another Nun from the Hotel Dieu Nunnery in Montreal.* Maria Monk herself was arrested for picking pockets in a brothel and died in prison in 1849. But her book had sold 300,000 copies by 1860 and is still in print in various versions today.

There were also fears of a Catholic political and military conspiracy, fears which the Pilgrims had brought with them in the *Mayflower.* In the 1830's, Lyman Beecher's *Plea for the West* revealed a plot to take over the Mississippi Valley, the Emperor of Austria being in league with the Pope to promote it. Samuel F.B. Morse, the inventor of the telegraph—who had harbored anti-Catholic feelings ever since he had failed during a visit to Rome to doff his hat to a papal procession and one of the Swiss guards had knocked it off—argued that the reactionary kings and emperors in Europe were deliberately contriving to swamp Protestant America by forcing Catholics to immigrate there. This conspiracy theory was made more plausible by the fact that, during the 1850's, America's population rose by 50 percent, more than a third of the increase being due to immigration, and much of that immigration consisting of Catholics.

The Catholic issue came into national politics with the emergence of the secretive ultra-Protestant American party, whose "I don't know" answer to a key question led to their popular title, the Know-Nothings. Maria Monk's book was termed "the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of Know-Nothingness" and the party became a national force before being merged into the Republican party in 1854.

It was notable that, whereas the Republican party became identified with the antislavery issue, the Roman Catholic hierarchy tended to remain noncommittal about it and took virtually no part in the crusade. Catholics tended to vote Democratic, and still do, not because they ever owned slaves but because of a lingering association in their minds of the Republican party with Protestant extremism. And conversely, until John F. Kennedy's election in 1960, it was argued that a Catholic could never enter the White House because of associations in the minds of too many Protestants with popish conspiracies against religious and political freedom.

The fact that Catholics mostly sat on their hands during the long controversy about slavery, which was primarily a religious one, brings us to the second precondition needed to make the American politico-religious system work.

There was no difficulty about the first precondition—the high level of religiosity. But the second precondition was a level of agreement on certain basic moral and ethical notions as interpreted in public institutions. It was here that the system broke down, for American Christianity could not agree about slavery.

The dilemma had been there right from the start, since 1619 marked the beginning both of representative government and of slavery. But it had slowly become more acute since the identification of American moral Christianity with democracy made slavery come to seem both an offense against God and an offense against the nation.

On the other hand, were not Southern slave owners Christians, too? Indeed they were. There had been a strong antislavery movement among the churches in the South, particularly the Baptists and Quakers, in the 1770's. It had petered out because the churches came to terms with Southern practice. But this did not, and could not, remove religion from the slavery question. The doctrinal position might be arguable, but the moral position—which was what mattered—became increasingly clear to the majority of American Christians.

The Civil War can be described as the most characteristic religious episode in the whole of American history since its roots and causes were not political and economic so much as religious and moral. It was a case of a moral principle tested to destruction, not of the principle but of those who opposed it. And in the process Christianity itself was placed under almost intolerable strain.

The movement which finally destroyed American slavery was religious in a number of different senses. It reflected a degree of extremism in the Northern Christian sects. William Lloyd Garrison, a Baptist converted to activism by Quakers, who founded the *Boston Public Liberator*, wrote in its first issue: "I will be as harsh as truth and as un-

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compromising as justice. On this subject I do not wish to think, to speak, or write, with moderation." Extremists on this issue had many links with revivalism, which gave it a nationwide platform and constituency.

Then, too, there was the theology of abolition which, as might be expected, was primarily a moral theology. In 1845 Edward Beecher published a series of articles on what he termed the nation's "organic sin" of slavery, which invested the abolitionist cause with a whole series of evangelical insights. Again, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* itself had a background in religion and especially moral theology: it was an improving tract as well as a piece of political propaganda.

There was little internal opposition to slavery among white Southern Christians, and a notable closing of ranks after the black preacher Nat Turner led the Virginia slave revolt of 1831, in which 57 whites were killed. Revivalism, which in the North strengthened the cause of abolition, was put to exactly the opposite use in the South, where it was, if anything, even more powerful. The South Carolina Baptist Association produced a biblical defense of slavery in 1822, and in 1844 John England, Bishop of Charleston, provided a similar one for Southern white Catholics. There were standard biblical texts on alleged Negro inferiority, patriarchal and Mosaic acceptance of servitude, and St. Paul on obedience to masters. Both North and South could and did hurl texts at each other.

HAVING split, the churches promptly went to battle on opposing sides when the war actually came. Leonidas Polk, Bishop of Louisiana, entered the Confederate army as a major-general and announced: "It is for constitutional liberty, which seems to us to have fled for refuge, for our hearthstones and our altars that we strike." Thomas March, Bishop of Rhode Island, preached to the militia on the other side: "It is a holy and righteous cause in which you enlist. . . . God is with us . . . the Lord of Hosts is on our side."

To judge by the hundreds of sermons and specially-composed church prayers which have survived on both sides, ministers were among the most fanatical of the combatants from beginning to end. The churches played a major role in dividing the nation, and it is probably true that it was the splits in the churches which made a final split in the nation inevitable.

In the North, such a charge was often willingly accepted. Granville Moddy, a Northern Methodist, boasted in 1861: "We are charged with having brought about the present contest. I believe it is true we did bring it about, and I glory in it, for it is a wreath of glory round our brow."

Southern clergymen did not make the same boast, but it is true that of all the various elements in the South they did the most to make a secessionist state of mind possible. Southern clergymen were also particularly responsible for prolonging the increasingly futile struggle. Both sides claimed vast numbers of "conversions" among their troops and a tremendous increase in churchgoing and prayerfulness as a result of the fighting.

The clerical interpretation of the war's progress was equally dogmatic and contradictory. The Southern Presbyterian theologian Robert Lewis Dabney blamed what he termed "the calculated malice" of the Northern Presbyterians and called on God for a "retributive providence" which would demolish the North. Henry Ward Beecher predicted that the Southern leaders would be "whirled aloft and plunged downward for ever and ever in an endless retribution." The New Haven theologian Theodore Thornton Munger declared that the Confederacy had been "in league with Hell," and the South was now "suffering for its sins" as a matter of "divine logic." He worked out that General McClellan's much-criticized vacillations were an example of God's masterful cunning since they made a quick Northern victory impossible and so ensured that the South would be much more heavily punished in the end.

By contrast, there were the doubts, the puzzlings, and the agonizing efforts of Abraham Lincoln to rationalize God's purpose. His evident and total sincerity shines through his speeches and letters and private musings as the war took its terrible toll. Although he was theoretically a Baptist, we have his wife's word for it that he never truly belonged to any church. It is not clear to this day whether he believed in a personal God in the traditional sense. Yet he declared himself "satisfied that when the Almighty wants me to do or not to do a particular thing, He finds a way of letting me know it." He thus waited, as the cabinet papers show, for providential guidance at certain critical points of the war. He never claimed to be the personal agent of God's will, as everyone else seemed to be doing. But he wrote:

> If it were not for my firm belief in an overruling providence it would be difficult for me, in the midst of such complications of affairs, to keep my reason in its seat. But I am confident that the Almighty has His plans and will work them out; and . . . they will be the wisest and the best for us.

When asked if God was on the side of the North, he replied: "I am not at all concerned about that, for I know the Lord is always on the side of the right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord's side." Hence his determination throughout to do the moral thing: "I am not bound to win but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live up to the light I have."

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IN THUS arguing within himself, Lincoln, it seems to me, incarnated and embodied the national, republican, and democratic morality which the American religious experience had brought into existence. He caught exactly the same mood as President Washington in his farewell message to Congress, which I quoted above, and that is one reason why his conduct of the events leading up to war, and the war itself, have seemed so unerringly in accord with the national spirit, so just, so American.

Unlike Governor Winthrop and the first colonists, Lincoln did not see the republic as the Elect Nation because that implied it was always right, and the fact that the Civil War had occurred at all indicated that America was fallible. But, if fallible, it was also anxious to do right. America, as he described it, was "the almost-chosen people," and the war was part of God's scheme, a great testing of the nation by an ordeal of blood, showing the way to charity and thus to rebirth.

The majority of Northern Christians took a more triumphalist view of events. They came to look upon the Civil War not as a Christian defeat, in which the powerlessness and contradictions of the faith had been exposed, but as an American-Christian victory, in which Christian egalitarian teaching had been triumphantly vindicated against renegades and apostates.

Such a view fit neatly into a world vision of the Anglo-Saxon races raising up the benighted and ignorant dark millions, and bringing them, thanks to a "favoring providence," into the lighted circle of Christian truth; thus the universalist mission of Christ would be triumphantly completed. The Civil War was the prelude to an enormous American missionary effort throughout what we now call the third world, followed in due course by actual military intervention in some places.

This agenda still had a Protestant moral coloring to it. The thinking behind it was conveyed in Leonard Woolsey Bacon's *History of American Christianity*, published in 1897 at the height of the era of imperialism:

> By a prodigy of divine providence the secret of the ages [that a new world lay beyond the sea] had been kept from premature disclosure. . . . If the discovery of America had been achieved . . . even a single century earlier, the Christianity to be transplanted to the Western world would have been that of the Church of Europe at its lowest stage of decadence [before being purged by the Reformation].

So he saw "great providential preparations as for some 'divine event' still hidden behind the curtain that is about to rise on our new century."

No wonder, then, that in the McKinley-Theodore Roosevelt era, the Protestant churches were often vociferous supporters of American expansion, especially at the expense of the crumbling remains of the Spanish empire, which they saw as a God-determined process by which "Romish superstition" was being replaced by "Christian civilization." President McKinley justified the American occupation of the Philippines in Christian evangelical terms:

> I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed to Almighty God for light and guidance that one night. And one night late it came to me this way. . . . There was nothing left for us to do but to take them all and educate the Filipinos and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow men for whom Christ also died.

However, by then this kind of Christian, more specifically Protestant, triumphalism was already beginning to ebb in Europe. There, the 1880's saw Christianity, in terms of church attendance, at its maximum extent per head of the population. Thereafter there was slow but progressive decline for most churches.

It was a different matter in the United States. Church attendance continued to increase throughout the first half of the 20th century. But these decades also demonstrated the limits of specifically Protestant power. Protestant churches campaigned against prizefighting as a moral evil, and succeeded in banning the Jack Johnson-Jim Jeffries fight in California. But the campaign as a whole failed.

The crusade against alcohol was even more ambitious. If the churches could overcome Negro slavery, it was argued, why would not the slavery of alcohol be a possible target? By 1900, thanks to largely Protestant pressure groups, 24 percent of the population lived in dry territory. By 1906, this had been extended to 40 percent. By 1917, there were 29 dry states and over half the American people lived on dry territory. In 1920, total prohibition became a fact.

But what looked at first like the greatest victory for American evangelicalism turned instead into its greatest defeat. The legislation was undiscriminating and too comprehensive. It bore the marks of an unreasoning religious fanaticism and it ignored much sympathetic and wise advice. It not merely excluded but alienated major religious groups such as the Catholics, many of whom, perhaps perversely, saw Prohibition as an attack on their religion. Hence the movement failed to make Prohibition stick, and it was not merely defeated but routed. This was a disaster for organized American Protestantism. It was accompanied and followed by a rapid decline in its domestic political power.

TRADITIONAL Protestant moral theology seemed to have no answer for the Depression. It regarded the New Deal and similar interventionist schemes as unscriptural

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and sinful. Except in the South, most Protestant ministers and periodicals favored the Republicans and opposed Franklin D. Roosevelt. In 1936, over 70 percent of 21,606 Protestant ministers polled voted for Roosevelt's Republican opponent, Alf Landon, who also got the votes of a large majority of all Protestant church members. He lost by a landslide nonetheless. Thus the middle decades of the 20th century marked a Protestant political retreat before a Democratic coalition in which Jews and Catholics and secular progressives all had increasing roles to play.

At the same time, however, those attending church regularly continued to increase. In 1910, the proportion of the population affiliated with all churches was calculated at 43 percent. It was the same figure in 1920. By 1940 it had risen to 49 percent, and this was followed by an impressive postwar "revival" lifting the percentage to 55 in 1950 and a remarkable 69 percent in 1960.

Even so, the detachment of American popular religion from its doctrinal basis continued. Ordinary churchgoers, for instance, showed themselves less and less inclined to read the New Testament. Religion seemed to be less and less about suffering and repentance and more and more about happiness. As long ago as the 1830's Tocqueville had complained of American preachers: "It is often difficult to ascertain from their discourse whether the principal object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the other world or prosperity in this." Now, more than a century later, religion and churchgoing served almost as a national talisman to ensure that economic expansion would continue into the 1950's and 1960's—an insurance policy against the end of affluence.

This period was also marked by the adoption of psychological concepts to induce tranquility and felicity, seen by some critics as a debased modern form of mysticism. Americans in vast numbers read Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's *Peace of Soul* (1949), Norman Vincent Peale's *Guide to Confident Living* (1948) and *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), and Billy Graham's *Peace with God* (1953).

These were variations on harmonial and gnostic themes which had long flourished in the United States, producing such phenomena as Christian Science, Theosophy, and American Rosicrucianism. They were thus Christian. But many cults, like Theosophy and the system pushed by Rudolf Steiner, had little common dogmatic ground with Christianity. And the religious spectrum shaded off into domestic revivals of other imperial religions such as Indian Vedanta, Persian Bahai, Zen Buddhism, and—especially among blacks—forms of Islam. Even in President Eisenhower's Washington, which symbolized the Christian revival of the mid-century, and where the tone was superficially ecumenical Protestant, the actual content was patriotic moralism and sentimentalized religiosity rather than specifically Christian.

In 1954 the phrase "under God," which had been used by Lincoln in his Gettysburg address, was added to the United States pledge of allegiance. In 1956 the device from the coinage, "In God We Trust," became the nation's official motto. But the nature of God was left undefined. President Eisenhower, himself the archetype of the generalized *homo Americanus religiosus*, asked the nation only for "faith in faith." He told the country in 1954: "Our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply-felt religious faith—and I don't care what it is."

Well, of course he did care, really. What he understood by faith was something compatible with the Protestant morality, vaguely based on Scripture, with which he was familiar. He could not define it any more than his predecessors, Washington and Lincoln, had been able to define the heavenly providence which they relied upon to see America right. But Eisenhower's trusting vagueness—or, as some would say, vacuity—was no longer enough, because in the second half of the 20th century America's religious, republican, and democratic consensus began to dissolve into new forms of civil warfare.

3. Sodom, Gomorrah, and Middletown

BEGINNING in the 1960's, and proceeding with increased emphasis since then, something strange has been occurring to the place of religion in American life. It is not so much that the number of Americans affiliated with particular churches has declined—though it has: the figure of 69 percent in 1960 has never been surpassed and is now appreciably lower. On the other hand, it is generally accepted that more than half the American people still attend a place of worship once a week, an index of religious practice unequaled anywhere in the world, certainly in a great and populous nation.

The difference, rather, lies in the status of religious belief in American life. Until the second half of the 20th century, religion, as we have seen, was held by virtually all Americans, irrespective of their beliefs or nonbelief, to be not only a desirable but an essential part of the national fabric. Therefore those who preached from the pulpit

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were acknowledged to be among the most valuable citizens of the country. As Tocqueville observed, there was no such thing as anticlericalism in America. Whereas in Europe religious practice and fervor were often, even habitually, seen as a threat to freedom, in America they were seen as its underpinning. In Europe, religion was presented, at any rate by the majority of intellectuals, as an obstacle to "progress"; in America, as one of its dynamics.

This huge and important difference between European and American attitudes is now becoming blurred, and is perhaps in the process of disappearing altogether. In Europe, the anticlericalism so marked in the first half of this century has declined sharply. In the United States it has come into existence, and is rising.

Indeed, for the first time in American history there is a widespread tendency, especially among educated people, and above all among intellectuals, to present the clergy as enemies of freedom and democratic choice. The suspicion and in some cases hatred focuses particularly on two types of clergy: the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the popular evangelicals. But it is directed against clergy from any religious group, including Orthodox Jewish and Islamic ones, who proclaim their religious beliefs, and their moral notions, in a nonapologetic and forthright manner.

Secondly, there is a further tendency among the same people to present religious belief of any kind which is held with certitude, and religious practice of any kind which is conducted with zeal, as "fundamentalist"—a term of universal abuse.

An adjectival ratchet-effect has been at work here. The usual, normal, habitual, and customary beliefs of many Christians (and Jews) have first been verbally isolated as "traditionalist," then as "orthodox," next as "ultra-orthodox," and finally as "fundamentalist," though they have remained the same beliefs all the time. This hostile adjectival inflation marks the changed perspective of many Americans that religious beliefs as such, especially insofar as they underpin moral certitudes, constitute a threat to freedom.

It is exactly the same attitude, part rational, part irrational, which in Europe underlay the old anticlericalism, and its progeny, militant secularism and atheism. Its appearance in America is new, and potentially very dangerous. For it is a divisive force, a challenge to the moral and religious consensus which was such an important part of American republican and democratic unity—and strength.

THE new American anticlericalism has two notable features, both characteristically American in themselves. The first is fear, accompanied by a conspiracy theory. The tendency to see huge and malevolent enemies, threatening all that Americans hold dear, who turn out to be creatures largely or even entirely of the imagination, is a recurrent feature of American history, and of "the paranoid style in American politics," as Richard Hofstadter has called it.

America's new anticlericals and antifundamentalists are very much in this tradition. They present the Vatican of Pope John Paul II and the fundamentalism of the Protestant "moral majority" as modern and almost revolutionary conspiracies of religious zealots to undermine the traditional right of Americans to enjoy divorce on demand, easy abortion, free love, homosexuality, and a life of unqualified hedonism. The fact that there is not the smallest element of novelty in the Vatican's teaching, or that the great majority of American religious believers have always been so-called fundamentalists, or that the "rights" threatened by the "conspiracy" were themselves unimaginable two generations ago—all this is brushed aside in the prevailing paranoia.

The second feature of the new hostility to religion in America is its very insistence on these human rights. This, too, is in the American tradition, though with an important qualification.

American independence was from the start based upon the assertion of rights: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights speak for themselves. One of the principal objects of the Congress, and still more of the Supreme Court, throughout American history has been to defend, uphold, extend, reinterpret, and embellish the rights of all Americans. Superficially at least, the great engine of American law has been fueled and driven by a rights-based philosophy.

However, underlying this political philosophy of rights—balancing, correcting, and making it workable in practice—has been an even deeper-rooted and more pervasive religious philosophy of duties. The distinction is all-important. The notion of rights is essentially political and secular. The securing of individual rights compatible with social cohesion is the whole art of politics. And the quest for rights is a secular activity precisely because the nonreligious approach sees the individual as an autonomous being with purely social obligations.

But equally, it is impossible for any religious philosophy to be rights-based. From a religious perspective, strictly speaking, no being has rights except God. Human beings merely have duties—to God and to each other—and the function of a church is to teach and endeavor to enforce those duties.

I personally would argue that the exact performance of duties is the only way in which valid human rights can in practice be upheld. But that is another question. What I am trying to suggest here is that, in a society whose political process is designed to secure and enlarge rights, but which

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is also a society driven, at a popular level, by powerful religious forces, the two are sooner or later bound to come into conflict—and that is what has now happened in the United States, on a great and increasing scale.

The historic American religious consensus, which allowed an ecumenical form of Judeo-Christian morality to be identified first with republicanism and then with democracy as well, was based upon an unspoken assumption that duties were wide-ranging and imperative. Congress and the courts could properly concentrate on enforcing rights because the churches, and the ardent men and women who composed them, could safely be left to ensure that all were aware of their duties too, and would perform them.

Once the stress on duties ceases to be sufficiently powerful, or ceases to operate at all among large sections of society, then a rights-based public philosophy tends to break down. There are more human rights, real or imaginary, than there is justice available to satisfy them. When the element of duty is subtracted from the drive for rights, the result is merely a conflict of rights.

SUCH conflicts of rights have always been inherent in American republicanism. The Civil War was a conflict of rights: between the collective rights of citizens organized as states and their collective rights as citizens organized in a union; between the property rights of white owners and the human rights of black slaves. Equally, one might add that until 1890, the right of Mormons to practice their religion, as guaranteed by the First Amendment, was in conflict with the right of Congress, reflecting the moral majority, to legislate against polygamous unions. This conflict was resolved at the time in favor of the majority, though similar conflicts over other issues are liable to recur as Islam becomes more potent in American life.

A more characteristically contemporary conflict of rights in America took place not long ago inside St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, when feminists and homosexuals united to interrupt the celebration of the Catholic mass in order to assert their right to abort their unborn children and to follow their sexual orientation.

The right of New York Catholics to practice and preach their religion without interference is guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, as amended; the right to abort has been upheld by the Supreme Court, and the right to engage in some forms of sexual deviance has been laid down by various ordinances. So here we have two sets of rights coming into conflict, and angry and even violent conflict. Moreover, the conflict of rights is reinforced by the conflict between rights and duties, since the Catholic congregation at St. Patrick's believes its right to hear mass celebrated is accompanied by its collective duty to follow Catholic teaching, which holds abortion to be abhorrent and homosexual practices sinful.

This kind of conflict in American society is envenomed by the fact that, at bottom, it is not a conflict between the religious and the secular impulse, but a war of religion. America is a deeply religious society even in its secularism. Its atheism, its agnosticism, above all its human-rights hedonism can be seen as a form of religious sectarianism—or, more precisely, of paganism. For when the tide of conventional belief ebbs away, the incoming surge deposits strange objects, often relics of a distant past, on the shore.

Thus, Rachel Carson, whose book *The Silent Spring*, published in 1963, inaugurated the popular ecological movement, inadvertently set in motion a modern form of crusade which was indeed a recrudescence of paganism. Where the animists of prehistory attributed living souls to rivers and groves, springs and mountains, so the more zealous environmentalists hold holy the tropical rain forests, the unsullied seas and lakes, the ozone layer, and all the multiple sacral phenomena of the ecosphere. The greenhouse effect substitutes for hell, the Society of Friends becomes the Friends of the Earth, the Mother of God is reincarnated as Mother Earth.

No shortage of sacred cows, either: where the ancient Egyptians venerated the ibex-god Thoth or the lion-god Bast, there are now those who campaign piously to save the whales or restore the white rhinoceros to its pristine jungle or ensure that the leopard keeps its spots. Fur coats and crocodile handbags are denounced as "unclean" or, worse, diabolical artifacts.

AT VARIOUS intellectual and emotional levels, many extinct forms of paganism have been revived, or survivals huffed and puffed into flame again. These cults exist in great numbers, especially in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Florida, and parts of New England. Some are merely self-regarding and self-isolated curiosities. Others are hostile to established religion and aggressively anti-Christian. They even put up signs: "Christians keep away: pagans dwell here." There is a form of pop sound, known as death-metal music, which actually advocates violence against Christians and their institutions, and in some places has led to vandalism against churches.

But these are self-conscious attempts to reanimate extinct rites whose spirit died long ago. Far less marginal and infinitely more significant is the neopaganism of the rights movement, for here we have a new and truly modern form of animism which exercises genuine cultic appeal to millions of educated people whose scientific knowledge and rationalism are matters of pride to them.

Almost every form of contemporary ideology can be assimilated into the pantheon of the new

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paganism. The god of gods—the Yahweh, or Allah, or Jupiter, or Zeus, or Amon-Ra—of the pantheon is the rights deity, who omnipotently presides over all efforts, from whatever angle of the progressive spectrum, to make claims upon the law, state, and society.

There is the god of health, who stands for the right to be free from sickness, or obesity, or cancer, or death itself; the sex god, whose cult is the unrestricted pursuit of one's sexual orientation and desires; the god of multiculturalism; the god of political correctness; the god of youth; and the god of children, who presides over a panoply of rights including the right to divorce their parents. There is the god of hedonism, whose votaries put the right to experience any or all available pleasures as the prime purpose of human existence.

And of course there is also a feminist deity; a god of the homosexuals; a goddess of the lesbians; and deities for the transvestites, the transsexuals, the handicapped, the mentally, vertically, or horizontally challenged, indeed, all those who can establish claims to special places in the hierarchy of rights.

That there should be inherent or actual conflicts of rights in such a pantheon is inevitable, and is only partly avoided by uneasy or unnatural coalitions. The feminist deity, campaigning against the commercial exploitation of women, is at war with the god of pornography, campaigning for the total abolition of censorship; the deity who presides over the rights of children is at odds with the god of the pedophiles; and there is a danger that with the expansion of medical knowledge of the unborn child in the womb, the goddess who campaigns against the abuse of living infants will be locked in deadly combat with the goddess of unrestricted abortion. The ancient Greek pantheon, which reverberated with the wars of the gods, was always in danger of toppling over into divine chaos, and a similar discord grips the neopagan rights pantheon from time to time, as when the god of multiculturalism indulges in a fit of anti-Semitism or the god of the sexual deviants locks horns with the god of genetics.

Now I do not want to carry this analogy too far and risk disbelief in its validity. But it is an extraordinary fact how closely these neopagan cults, in the guise of single-issue rights groups, resemble religious bodies, with their charismatic leaders, their creeds or agendas, their slogans or incantations or litanies, their catenae of cardinal virtues and deadly sins, their demonstrations or processions of faith, their hieratic vernaculars and rituals. They often start in the catacombs and then emerge in public to profess their faith openly: they "come out," as Christians began to do in the 3rd century; adherents stress "black pride" or "gay pride," as Christians once made the sign of the cross publicly to confess their faith, and as Roman Catholics still do. Militant feminists refer to themselves as "wymin" or even "sisters," as do enclosed nuns. There are countless identifying clothes, fashions, and hairstyles, performing the same functions as Quaker collars, monkish tonsures, Greek Orthodox beards, hasidic caps and garments. Chains and lockets and earrings are sported like phylacteries or rosary beads.

Not least, these rights groups or single-issue cults produce their own scriptures or literatures. I am struck, when I visit a large campus bookstore, by the way in which these special publications are now grouped together in a distinct section, which is often—usually—larger than that devoted to traditional religious literature.

Most mainstream church hierarchies, in responding to the challenge of the new pagans, have been weak and indecisive. Almost without exception these churches have been systematically penetrated by rights groups in their guise as lobbyists and activists.

An important watershed was the Second Vatican Council, 1962-65. Hitherto, the Catholic Church had been exceptionally rigorous in repelling boarders from pressure groups, especially those with aims which could be described as "modernist"; and American Catholic bishops had been unusually ultramontane and obedient in carrying out this isolationist policy. The effect of the Council was to relax Catholic guards everywhere, but the consequences in the United States were disproportionately radical.

From being one of the most conformist, the American hierarchy rapidly became one of the least, and this pattern of behavior was adopted by many religious orders, including the once ultraorthodox Jesuits. American Catholic universities and publications, from being citadels of doctrinal zeal, propagated the new heterodoxies and welcomed infiltration by the single-issue lobbies. And while the Catholics wavered and succumbed, the Episcopalians held out their hands even more eagerly, followed in turn by Presbyterians and Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, and most of the rest.

On issues such as the ordination of women, artificial contraception, abortion, the remarriage of divorced persons, homosexuality, revision of the liturgy to permit new cultic practices and music, there were, during the 1960's and still more in the 1970's and 1980's, some notable accommodations with the new—or, as critics would put it, some scandalous surrenders of principle. In many cases, the lines of demarcation between the mainstream churches and the neopagan cults became blurred or even invisible.

The removal of distinctive landmarks was hastened, naturally, by the ecumenical movement within Christianity. This had been gathering speed since 1900 or thereabouts, but the

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really striking acceleration occurred during and after the 1960's, when the Catholic hierarchy began to cooperate in earnest. Ecumenicalism came easier to the United States than to most Christian societies, since the stress on divisive dogmas had never been great—often nonexistent—and the American Christian moral consensus, underpinning republicanism and democracy, was an ecumenical movement in itself. Hence the official ecumenical movement endorsed by the mainstream church hierarchies proceeded smoothly.

However, unlike the American consensus itself, this development has borne few of the marks of a popular movement. It has been a largely clerical affair of bishops and pastors and moderators and ministers, moving serenely through a labyrinth of committees and statements and resolutions, generating quiet satisfaction or self-satisfaction, rather than mass enthusiasm—the hieratic not the demotic.

Nevertheless, by embodying a search for the lowest common denominators of agreement, on morals not less than in dogmatic theology, the ecumenical movement has facilitated acceptance by the mainstream churches, or at any rate by their governing bodies, of the agendas of the neopagan pressure groups and single-issue lobbies.

By contrast, and in reaction to this slide into moral confusion, there has been an unofficial but infinitely more powerful and popular—and very largely spontaneous—movement within the established churches to uphold the traditional moral consensus and to emphasize its core beliefs, springing from the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Decalogue.

This coming together of what might be called Ten Commandment Christians, joined also by large numbers of traditionalist Jews—and watched with some sympathy by Muslims and members of other more remote faiths—constitutes the alternative ecumenicalism, which is largely nonclerical, nonhierarchic, unofficial, and unstructured, led by laymen and, above all, popular. In one way or another it expresses the Moral Majority—that is, those Americans who feel that the old republican-democratic moral consensus, loosely termed the American Way of Life, is still true, valid, and central to America's survival as a united, healthy, law-abiding, and prosperous society.

This alternative ecumenicalism, unlike the official ecumenicalism of committees and resolutions, has a genuine demotic ring to it, and is characterized by the usual marks of spiritual enthusiasm—overflowing services, mass meetings, demonstrations, activism—sometimes even violence. It is in itself a form of religious revival, another Great Awakening, and it is indeed fundamentalist in that it seeks to reassert fundamental moral truths once taken for granted and virtually unchallenged.

The emergence of this popular form of ecumenicalism, largely in response to the encroachments of neopagan hedonism, has brought about a new wave of religious warfare in the United States. Some see it as a battle between megalopolis and the rest—between supposedly godless metropolitan areas like New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, and the countryside of farms and of small and medium-sized towns where churchgoing is the norm and traditional moral values are respected—between, as it were, the Cities of the Plain and the City upon a Hill; between Sodom and Gomorrah and Middletown.

The new religious war can be seen, too, as a conflict between the values of the Bible and the values of the mass media. It is certainly a conflict between an approach to citizenship based on rights and one based on duties.

It is a war fought over many issues: the state schools and what is permitted within them; the use of taxpayers' money; the interpretation of the Constitution by the courts; the enactment of congressional and state legislation on private and public morals; and the selection of candidates for public office. But there is one issue which transcends in importance all the others and which, in a determining way, sums up all the arguments and attitudes on both sides—abortion.

This, as I noted above, can be described as a conflict of rights—between the right of an unborn child to life and the right of a childbearing woman to control over her body. But it is much more than this because it also and once again involves the conflict between rights and duties, between a humanist society which puts the interests and views of men and women as the paramount guide to conduct and a religious society which acknowledges the higher law of an external deity.

There are some who see the argument, and indeed the physical, legislative, and political battle over abortion, as the greatest challenge to the unity and conscience of the American people since the Civil War itself. There are certainly many uneasy parallels. The complex of issues which brought about the Civil War—slavery, states' rights, the survival of the union—rumbled away almost from the beginning of the union itself, occasionally breaking surface and threatening open discord, then subsiding as a compromise was patched up. But in the end it had to be resolved one way or the other and the result was the Civil War, leaving scars which, in the South at least, took a century to heal.

Abortion is a similar kind of problem, involving a complex of moral, constitutional, and social issues, which arouses great passion and obstinacy on both sides and which cannot be resolved by compromise or good will. Society can be anesthetized about the facts of abortion, just as it once could be about the facts of slavery, but the more

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the facts are exposed the uglier they seem, especially since scientific advances allow us to perceive what is taking place in the womb and at what an early point following conception the fetus becomes a child, indeed a person. The humanization of the fetus, like the humanization of the slave, is fatal to the case for the institution of abortion.

All this indicates that the conflict will deepen as the years go by, just as the conflict over slavery did until it was resolved by the victory of one side. The abortion argument also resembles the argument over slavery in that it transcends the issue itself and involves entire attitudes and mentalities. Around it and reinforced by it are the arguments between belief and the suspension of belief, between church and state, right and duty, freedom and obligation.

These issues have tended to divide societies since the dawn of history, but America, with its open society, with its passion for free debate, and, not least, with its lingering sense of mission to teach the world what is good and noble, provides the perfect forum for the contest to be fought to a finish.

The tragedy is that this heated, divisive issue, which is both the chief battleground and the symbol of American's civil war of religion, comes at a time when the integrity of the United States and the unity of the American people are also threatened by other powerful forces.

As we have seen, American society was from the outset, even when it was merely a collection of fragile English colonies, an attempt to build a special kind of society, a City upon a Hill, uniquely dedicated to the godly life, whose sacral character—according to Calvinist philosophy—was reflected in its worldly prosperity. For such a society to function at all, it needed a focus of unity. This was originally provided not merely by the Protestant faith and later, as the diversity of religious worship increased, by a common moral code; in the 17th and for much of the 18th century there was another focus of unity: the English language, English law, political customs and assumptions.

Gradually, however, a growing number of immigrants arrived to whom the English language was foreign and the American version of English culture alien. From this point, the importance of the religious consensus increased, as the melting pot, that great social cauldron, which transmuted a multiracial and multiethnic human material into a single people, was constructed, heated, and stirred, and did its marvelous work.

The adoption of the English language was the ostensible sign that the melting pot worked. But in some ways it was a superficial sign, and to the historian it is clear that the principal ingredient which transformed an alien immigrant into an American citizen, and someone able, eager, and proud to pursue the American way of life, was precisely the moral ecumenicalism, the religious consensus on what constituted right conduct. Indeed, it was more than an ingredient, it was the psychological and moral framework within which the melting and transmutation could take place.

Today the obstructions to the melting machinery are formidable and growing. Forces are present which seek to prevent it from working at all, or even to reverse its workings. Many wish to keep the foreign elements in the immigrants of today in their pristine and alien state, and even to realienate those already absorbed. One of America's leading historians, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has written a book about this phenomenon, entitled *The Disuniting of America.*

Now what is significant about this process, and I would say sinister, is that it is driven by the same machinery—the single-issue lobby—which empowers and makes formidable American neopaganism. The American political system is peculiarly susceptible to single-issue politics, and single-issue politics are peculiarly adapted to work on ethnic feelings and cultural, racial, and linguistic separateness. America's sheer ethnic diversity makes the spread of single-issue political lobbying, conducted on an ethnic basis, peculiarly destructive of unity. The seamless garment of nationhood is in danger of being unraveled, with unpredictable consequences for America itself and the world.

And it is not just the ethnic and cultural divisions among Americans that are being stressed by this process. Americans are also being presented, in the political process, in the media, in society as a whole, as divided by sex or gender, by sexual orientation and preference, by age-grouping presented as antagonistic, by physical ability or disability, by size and shape—by any distinguishing characteristics which present opportunities for lobbying and for the manufacture of a single issue. The same forces which obstruct the melting-pot process by stressing ethnic and racial origin also stand behind one of the antagonists in America's religious civil war.

Now there are some who argue that there is nothing sacrosanct about American national unity, that the American nation as such is not an unmitigated good, that the American way of life is by no means the most desirable or reputable way of life—that, in short, the United States of America is not the ideal political and social creation it has claimed to be. These critics dwell savagely on the sins of America in recent decades, in Vietnam and elsewhere, and they even point to the forces of disintegration in American society as in some respects salutary, as signs of repentance. They say there is too much nationalism in the world, as witness the fate of former Yugoslavia, and that American nationalism is not neces-

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sarily more righteous than any other. From this perspective, the disuniting of America is a welcome thing.

But this seems to me to turn the nationalist argument on its head. The object of the melting pot—or one of its objects anyway—was precisely to disarm the mutually competing and destructive nationalisms of the old world, based as they were on ancient linguistic, ethnic, and cultural antagonisms, and replace them by a new form of nationalism which was international, irenic, ecumenical, and benign.

The point was to transform warring peoples into one people at peace with itself, the chosen people or at least (in Lincoln's phrase) the almost-chosen people. It was to be a new kind of nation-society, republican in its form, democratic in its politics, in its tone and social intercourse following an agreed moral code. All this was underpinned, in fact made possible at all, only by the religious consensus I have described. It was the cement of the entire sublime and adventurous construct.

I SUBMIT that the dramatic global events of the 1980's and 1990's, far from diminishing, have actually strengthened the case for the existence of such a construct in the world: a great and mighty nation which is something more than a nation, which is an international community in itself, a prototype global community, but which at the same time is a unity, driven by agreed assumptions, accepting a common morality and moral aims, and able therefore to marshal and deploy its forces with stunning effect.

It is impossible, looking back, to see how the world would have survived the strain of the cold war without the United States; still more difficult to see how it can survive the disturbed and unpredictable aftermath without an America which is still united behind an agreed morality and a common purpose. There is now, and for the foreseeable future, only one superpower in the world, and that is the United States. This may or may not be desirable—I believe it is—but it is certainly a fact.

As the sole superpower it is essential that the United States retain the purity of its republicanism and the efficiency of its democracy, and that it debate its aims and actions with all the thoroughness which its immense diversity of ethnic origin makes uniquely possible—but having debated, and voted, and decided, it must then act with the unity and resolution which its position of world leadership demands.

For all these reasons, the peculiar form of religious and moral consensus which has been developed in America is not an anachronism but is more urgently needed than ever.

I often wonder what Abraham Lincoln, who provided America with the leadership it needed in the greatest crisis in its history, would have felt about the nation's task today, when it is asked to provide leadership for a distracted and dangerous world. He was himself a typical product of the religious consensus: a man who believed in providence rather than a personal, describable God, nominally a Baptist but a member of no regular church—a loose cannon on the religious deck in the eyes of the right-thinking. With it all, he was a man in whom the religious consensus had done its moral work to extraordinary effect—a man who could distinguish clearly and accurately, under the greatest stress of events, what was right and what was wrong, and who could make his decisions plain and acceptable to a vast electorate, to the point where it would expend a great quantity of blood and treasure to carry them out. In short, a man for all seasons, and an example of how the peculiar religious process of American nation-building could deliver exactly what was required.

What would this remarkable man think today? He might, I believe, still be inclined to categorize Americans as the almost-chosen people: a nation seeking the ideal but falling some way short of it. But he would also, I feel sure, consider its unity to be as much worth preserving—even fighting for—as in his own day, and he would look eagerly for those forces which could sustain and, if need be, rebuild that unity. Among those forces he would recognize, despite all his own skepticism, that by far the most important is the deep religious emotions which have always inspired, and still do inspire, the conduct of most Americans. And, forced to choose between Sodom and Gomorrah and Middletown, it would be in Middletown that he would set up his standard.

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Comes the Counterrevolution

Norman Podhoretz

IT TOOK a few days to sink in, but within a week or so after the elections of 1994, there was general agreement that the astounding Republican sweep and the correlative Democratic disaster represented something deeper than a mere swing of the political pendulum.

Of course some Democrats tried to rationalize, explain away, or even deny the dimensions of their defeat. Like their predecessors who attributed the Republican landslides of 1972, 1980, and 1984 to the poor quality of their candidates, these Democrats blamed Bill Clinton for the debacle of 1994. Though the President himself was not running this time, they said, his unpopularity had rubbed off on most of the Democrats who were.

Yet the Democrats who took this line professed to be mystified by Clinton's low ratings. After all, the economy was growing nicely; the deficit was down; a great crime bill had passed; and things were going well in Haiti, Korea, and the Middle East. Why was Clinton—and, by extension, his party—not getting credit for these achievements?

One tempting answer was a failure of communication. But this explanation was hard to accept, given Clinton's universally admired skills as a communicator.

The fallback theory, which had become more and more widely accepted during the campaign as the polls more and more clearly registered the breadth and depth of voter discontent, was that an anti-incumbent fever was sweeping the land. Unfortunately for this theory, the only incumbents who lost on election day were Democrats. Not a single Republican holding office in the House, in the Senate, or in the Governors' mansions was replaced by a Democrat. Of a total of 177 of these Republican incumbents, not one, anywhere, was unseated. On top of winning control of both houses of Congress, the Republicans captured 11 Governors' mansions that were previously occupied either by Democrats or independents. And whereas the Republicans retained control of all the state legislative chambers in which they already had a majority, a minimum of 15 chambers* formerly controlled by the Democrats were captured by the Republicans and three more wound up evenly split thanks to Republican gains.

This stunning set of results was pooh-poohed by one of Clinton's pollsters who pointed out that it had been brought about by a mere 2-percent shift to the Republicans in the aggregate vote. But such complacency ignored the fact that to beat an incumbent even narrowly is a hard thing to do (since incumbents almost always have more money); not to mention the fact that in beating enough of them to take control of both houses of Congress, the Republicans managed a stunt that had not been pulled off for 40 years; and not to mention the additional fact that they did this without any help from the coattails of a popular leader.

The same amazing facts were even more fatal to the desperate theory espoused by the President himself. The voters, Clinton said at his morning-after press conference, were dissatisfied with the pace and the amount of progress he had already made toward the goals they had elected him to achieve.

Obviously, however, if that were the case, the Democrats would have won more seats in Congress—enough to prevent the Republicans from "obstructing" the programs and policies allegedly favored by a majority of the American people. Instead the voters did the opposite—and the Republicans they elected to replace Democratic incumbents were almost entirely drawn from the conservative wing of the party.

A variant of Clinton's theory was put forward by Jesse Jackson and other leftists. They argued that Clinton had indeed been moving too slowly and hesitantly in their direction and had thereby failed to energize his liberal base. With minorities and women and the unions sitting on their hands because of their disappointment with the President, the field had been abandoned to the zealots of the Right whose appeals to hatred and fear had brought out their troops in disproportionate numbers.

The element of truth in Jackson's version of the theory concerned the unhappiness of many on the Left with Clinton. But it was ridiculous to conclude that if he had governed in such a way as

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* As of this writing, the final tallies were not in yet.

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to make them enthusiastic, the Democrats would have won. For the exit polls, and a wealth of other evidence, revealed that it was precisely the kind of big-government liberalism these groups on the Left advocate that was so roundly repudiated in 1994. And it was precisely to the extent that Clinton was already seen as one of them that he hurt his party as a whole.

WHICH brings us to Clinton the politician. He is often praised, even by Republicans, as a master politician, by which they seem to mean that he is the "comeback kid" who never gives up and can never be written off. Yet what is most striking and most surprising about his performance in office these past two years is its gross political ineptitude.

His first mistake, right out of the gate, was recklessly exposing the degree to which he was still what Congressman Newt Gingrich would later call (to much disingenuous derision and indignation among liberals) a "counterculture McGovernik."* This he did by denying his centrist "New Democratic" base any but a minor role in his administration, by making appointments on the basis of race and gender, and by trying to force the military to accept openly homosexual recruits.

Having thus offended the New Democrats, he turned around and angered the labor movement with his support of NAFTA. At the same time he disturbed many blacks (or at any rate the black caucus in Congress) when he backed away from his choice of the black radical Lani Guinier to head the civil-rights division of the Justice Department. He then tried to make it up to the black caucus by changing his policy on Haiti and deciding to invade. Yet not even the success (so far) of that operation brought him much credit with anyone else, since no one else cared much one way or the other about Haiti (though there would certainly have been an outcry if American troops had been killed there).

Whatever the particular merits of these various positions (I for one think Clinton was wrong about gays in the military and right about NAFTA, for example), together they managed to put off old supporters without attracting new ones: the very definition of political incompetence.

But of course the most compelling evidence of Clinton's ineptitude as a politician was his health-care plan. It was bad enough that, having been elected with only 43 percent of the vote, he imagined that he actually had a mandate to revolutionize a major sector of American society, and that he thought his overbearing wife, who seems to be politically tone-deaf altogether, was the right person to execute this mandate. What made it even worse was his blindness to the reality that in the America of the 1990's the idea of a government takeover of medical care—or, for that matter, of anything else—ran counter to the political winds that would blow so many Democrats away in 1994. (In case any doubts later remained about this, a post-election poll sponsored by the Democratic Leadership Council showed, according to the *New York Times*, that "Mr. Clinton's proposal to overhaul the national health-care system had been devastating to the Democrats because it had become a symbol of big government.")

Even Clinton's skills as a campaigner, which seemed so formidable when he was running for President, deserted him in 1994. Thus, when the Republicans issued their "Contract with America," Clinton—evidently under the illusion that it was Ronald Reagan rather than George Bush he had beaten in 1992 and that it was smart politics to run against Reagan again—gleefully joined his fellow Democrats in attacking the contract as an effort "to take us back to the failed policies of the 80's."

Not only did presenting the election as a choice between him and Reagan help ensure the defeat of his party; it also made it easier for the Republicans to interpret their victory as, precisely, a mandate to return (in the words of the columnist Charles Krauthammer) "to Reagan's central vision of relimiting and, in some areas, delegitimizing government." In that sense, another columnist, George Will, was exactly right in calling this election Reagan's third victory.

CURIOUSLY, however, the response by liberals to Newt Gingrich's prospective accession to power in 1995 as Speaker of the House was much more hysterical than the reaction to Reagan's first victory in 1980. There were a few predictable warnings in 1980 about an "incipient fascism," but on the whole the liberal press was surprisingly benign. For instance, Tom Wicker, then a columnist for the *New York Times*, declared:

> If Mr. Reagan can demonstrate . . . that he's in control, knows where he wants to go, and has a reasonable sense of how to get there, that assurance alone will cause Americans to sustain him in many a disappointment along the way.

Even Wicker's more strident colleague, Anthony Lewis, warning his fellow Americans that Reagan would soon make changes they would deplore, advised them to abandon their euphoria in favor of—not wariness or determined opposition, but "modified rapture."

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* A rare exception to this disingenuous outcry on the Left was an honest piece in the *Village Voice* by Ellen Willis. Unlike, say, Frank Rich of the *New York Times*, who scoffed at Gingrich for identifying Clinton—"a non-inhaling Fleetwood Mac fan, of all unlikely hippies"—with the counterculture, Willis acknowledged that "The Clintons are inescapably 60's figures. Their history, their body language, their visceral response to social issues carries the imprint of sex, drugs, rock and roll, Vietnam protest, and feminism—a cultural taint no amount of pandering to big business, religion, and family values can wipe out."

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Here, by contrast, is how Lewis greeted the prospect of Gingrich's elevation to Speaker of the House:

> Slash and burn, knife and smear: the Gingrich instincts are unrelenting. Herblock got it right in his *Washington Post* cartoon when he had Mr. Gingrich crawling out of the same sewer where he portrayed Richard Nixon years ago.

A few days earlier a *Times* editorialist had traced Gingrich's political lineage to the racist demagogues of the Old South. Not to be outdone, Lewis slyly conjured up the ghost of Joe McCarthy by urging Clinton to deal with Gingrich by following the example of Harry Truman who "had the courage to veto foolish anti-Communist bills at the height of the cold war."

The *New Yorker*'s Sidney Blumenthal also saw the ghosts of Nixon and McCarthy hiding under Gingrich's bed:

> . . . Mr. Gingrich promises endless investigations into putative Clinton scandals. Though the spectacle is likely to be pale compared with the ferreting out of un-American activities by Nixon and McCarthy, it will nonetheless be part of the restoration, providing a link with tradition.

To Anna Quindlen of the *Times*, on the other hand, there was nothing pale about the spectacle of Gingrich himself. He was now, she charged, "the most powerful public purveyor" of "the single most pernicious force in American discourse," an "ethos [which] makes so much bigotry possible: racism, sexism, homophobia," and which is driving the Republican party "into the fallow ground of meanness, the purview of the schoolyard bully, picking off the weaker one by one."

Such rhetoric was entirely characteristic of coverage of Gingrich in the liberal media. In fact, according to the Center for Media and Public Affairs, which tabulates favorable as against unfavorable references on the CBS, NBC, and ABC evening-news broadcasts, Gingrich's rating during the campaign was 100-percent negative! Herblock may have placed Gingrich in the sewer he originally created for Nixon, but I doubt that even Nixon ever matched Gingrich's perfect record on network television. As the *Times*'s Frank Rich frankly admitted, "foaming at the mouth about Newt Gingrich" was now the liberals' "new addiction"—not that this prevented Rich from going on to take a shot of the new drug himself by "regurgitating . . . the new liberal catechism," complete with invocations of Nixon and McCarthy.

WHAT accounts for this outburst of hysteria? The most obvious factor is frustration and disappointment. When Clinton was elected in 1992, liberals were elated by the prospect of a return to political power after twelve long years in exile. Clinton himself might not have been the ideal leader of this liberal "restoration" (to borrow Sidney Blumenthal's term and apply it to a much more appropriate context), but he was certainly better than nothing and his heart seemed to be in the right place.

In any case, no less an authority than the famous historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. had assured his fellow liberals that Clinton's election placed them at the beginning of a new 30-year cycle of "affirmative government." Now, instead of being able to look forward to 28 more years of political dominance, liberalism suddenly and unexpectedly finds itself more naked unto its worst enemies than ever before.

Compounding liberal frustration and disappointment, then, is a strong dose of fear. For there is no doubt that Gingrich's hostility to liberalism and all its works is *serious*. When he says that he wants to deconstruct the welfare state (the one species of deconstruction the liberal culture dislikes), and also to lead a battle against "counterculture McGoverniks" and "secular left-wing values," he means it. What is more, he is convinced that the American people are solidly on his side.

It seems evident to me that behind the hysteria of the liberal media is the awful suspicion that Gingrich may be right about the contemporary popular mood. And behind the effort to demonize him is the hope that all this vilification will frighten him into backing off—that is, that he will "grow" in office, as so many other firebrands have done before him in response to attacks by the liberal culture.

Schlesinger, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, expresses this hope explicitly:

> The interesting conflict in the months ahead may not be so much a Republican Congress vs. a Democratic President, as Newt Gingrich vs. Bob Dole. Mr. Dole, for all his sardonic oppositionist wit, is at heart a constructive and responsible leader. . . . Will the cocky Speaker now defer to his more thoughtful and experienced colleague, who is after all merely the Republican leader in the Senate?

Nothing daunted by the humiliating refutation the 1994 election supplied to his earlier predictions (whose only recent rival for total wrongheadedness are the forecasts of heavy American casualties made in 1990 by opponents of the Gulf war), Schlesinger steps right up to the plate with another one. If, he warns, Gingrich does not mend his rambunctious ways, he will be so discredited and so marginalized that most people will be ashamed to associate themselves with his policies:

> Indeed, Speaker Gingrich will very likely emerge as God's gift to the Democrats. His take-no-prisoners truculence, his ideological anti-government extremism, and his unbridled

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tongue will not persuade many outside the Bible Belt and the old Confederacy.

IN MY OPINION, Schlesinger's speculations about Gingrich will go the way of his assurances in 1992 that the election of Clinton marked a turn in the political tide toward a renewed faith in big-government liberalism. Gingrich will not be intimidated by cries of racism, sexism, and homophobia from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and the newsmagazines and the TV networks. I think he has written them all off anyway and that he will continue to use the same alternative channels—the radio talk shows, C-Span, and other cable-television outlets—that he relied on to get his message across in the first place.

Nor will support for the direction in which he wants to move the country be confined to what Schlesinger—still failing in his smugly provincial way to understand what is going on politically in America today—dismisses as the Bible Belt and the old Confederacy (by which, of course, he means all the people he considers fanatics and rednecks, yahoos and troglodytes).

Surely if the election of 1994 proved anything, it was that most Americans everywhere—and not just fundamentalist Christians and white Southerners—have lost their faith in the vast network of social programs originally spawned by the Democrats in the 1960's. People all over this country (including even a few liberals) now understand that these programs, far from winning the "war on poverty" they were launched to fight, have had a great deal to do with the spread of illegitimacy and violent crime.

Furthermore, it is clear from all the polling data that most Americans everywhere have also turned decisively and definitively against the more novel instrumentalities the country has inherited from the 1960's, especially affirmative action, quotas, and reverse discrimination. Whether with respect to blacks or to women, these are now regarded by large majorities as unfair, as damaging to the economy, and as harmful to the relations both between the races and between the sexes.

Nor is it merely in "the Bible Belt and the old Confederacy" that more and more people agree with Gingrich about the damage done to our society by the assault on middle-class morality and the promulgation of sexual libertinism of every variety which stemmed from the counterculture of the 1960's. Like Schlesinger, Frank Rich makes fun of conservatives who blame the counterculture "for everything immoral, violent, and sexually explicit in American culture today." Pathetic rubes that they are, Rich chortles, they seem not to have noticed that the counterculture "was long ago annexed by a corporate culture that employs the Beatles' 'Revolution' to hawk Nikes." But the joke is on Rich, who seems not to have noticed that it is this very trickle-down effect—this seepage into the entire society of attitudes and mores that were once confined to a radical fringe—that alarms most Americans. Which is why in one recent poll, for example, 54 percent of the respondents declared that "the social and economic problems that face America are mainly the result of a decline in moral values."

The poll did not ask what was to blame for this decline, but given that approximately 90 percent of Americans profess belief in God and that more than 50 percent are to be found in church every Sunday, it would be amazing if the "secular left-wing values" attacked by Gingrich were not held at least partly responsible.

In short, the American people *do* support Gingrich's twin assaults on the entrenched institutions of the welfare state and the moral legacy of the counterculture. And no more than Gingrich himself are they any longer likely to be prevented by cries of racism, sexism, and homophobia from applauding an honest debate on these issues.

Indeed, my own guess is that they relish Gingrich's aggressive candor, which contrasts so sharply with the protective coloration that devitalizes the usual run of political babble. (Even an enemy like Frank Rich makes an invidious comparison between Clinton's "flip-flopping" and Gingrich's "forthrightness about his views, his vivid use of language, his ferocious tenacity, and rigid focus.") At a time when politicians are vastly unpopular, it becomes an asset not to sound like one, from which it follows that the worst thing Gingrich could do would be to start talking in "statesmanlike" tones.

THE one bright spot in this picture for the Democrats and the liberal elites in general is their expectation that the counterrevolution will fail.

The most outlandish expression of this expectation came from Peter Jennings of ABC, who declared:

> The voters had a temper tantrum last week. . . . Now what? The screaming two-year-old has our attention, but the country, like the family, can't run for long on vituperation. . . . No matter what a politician might tell us, and perhaps even believe, there are no quick solutions to many of the complications we face in the late 20th century. . . . The country can't be run by an angry two-year-old.

Others, adopting a more moderate tone, say that if the Republicans keep their promise to cut taxes, the deficit will grow (since the only spending cuts Congress will dare to make will be insufficient to compensate for the loss of revenue), and inflation will heat up again. Nor, the Democrats claim, will Republican programs give us safer streets or better schools or fewer illegitimate babies. And Thomas B. Edsall of the *Washington Post* adds an interesting fillip when he writes:

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> Underpinning the revolution in American politics that took place Tuesday [November 8] are forces challenging not just Democratic liberalism but the dominant liberal culture in ways that are going to be very difficult for the newly ascendant Republican party to satisfy.

Well, about all that we shall see soon enough. But the counterrevolution may not be required to deliver everything all at once. It may be sufficient—for the voters as well as for the good of the country—if a beginning can be made in reducing the harm that the federal government has been doing in so many areas of our national life.

The reason this may be sufficient is that the Republicans are not being asked to substitute new government programs for the old ones created by the Democrats. As William Kristol—who heads the Project for the Republican Future and who is for all practical purposes the intellectual leader of his party—puts it: "The GOP challenge is an odd one. . . . Having grasped the reins of power, the Republican party must be disciplined enough to *give that power away.*" Not, of course, to the Democrats, but to the people, through "sharply limited government, lower taxes, . . . and the reduction—even termination—of destructive or ineffective social-welfare programs."

Giving power away does not involve total passivity. It means, says Kristol, that "Republicans will pursue a broad and ambitious agenda of conservative reform: welfare reform, health-care reform, legal reform, and economic-growth incentives. . . ."

Again, however, the goal of these reforms remains directly antithetical to what the liberal agenda tries to achieve: the conservative purpose is not to extend but to reduce the range of government intervention and to cede "greater authority to individuals and families," as well as to "average Americans and entrepreneurs." The theory behind it all is that the problems the federal government has either been unable to solve, or has exacerbated by attempting to solve, can more effectively be dealt with at the local level and by individuals and families and churches and neighborhood groups.

Newt Gingrich and his fellow counterrevolutionaries are persuaded that this theory, in essence, is what the American people were voting for in November 1994. I think the counterrevolutionaries are right. For more than 30 years, Americans have been living in a totally politicized world—a world in which everything has been sucked into the political realm. In such a world every problem is thought to have its roots in social forces and therefore to have a political solution: in such a world even the personal, as the feminists (and not they alone) like to proclaim, is political. Weary unto death of this way of looking at life, thoroughly disabused of the illusions it has fostered, and choking on the pathologies it has encouraged, Americans are experiencing what might be described as a withdrawal of affect from politics.

It is a feeling best and most succinctly expressed in the 18th century in a couplet by Dr. Johnson: "How small, of all that human hearts endure, / That part which laws or kings can cause or cure." The rest, the larger part—so Dr. Johnson implies—is up to God, and to us.

This, I suggest, captures the deeper meaning of the disgust with politicians, and with Washington, that came out in the campaigns of 1994 and that accounted for the defeat of so many Democratic incumbents and the election of so many conservative proponents of limited government.

Sensing this deeper meaning, the defenders of contemporary liberalism, which is based on the opposite view of life, have been driven to a frenzy. Their hold over our major cultural institutions—the national media, the universities, the arts both popular and high—remains firm, and from these protected sanctuaries they will carry on a ferocious guerrilla war against Newt Gingrich and his followers. But in their hearts they know that in the political sphere at least they are losing their power to define what is mainstream or respectable and what is marginal or extremist; knowing this they also know that their political influence in the present and their prospects for the future are very dim indeed. No wonder their hysteria has reached so feverish a pitch.

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From Schnitzler to Kushner

Edward Norden

THE good-looking young men cruising the aisles were putting on a show of their own. "Questionnaires!" they sang as they handed out pink forms to everybody. "Get your questionnaires!" The curtain of the Walter Kerr theater on Broadway would not be going up on this performance of *Millennium Approaches*, Part 1 of *Angels in America*,* before everyone in the audience did his or her duty. If the *Angels* scripts, T-shirts, and baseball caps in the foyer were yours to buy or not, the questionnaire verged on mandatory.

And so the Jewish Long Islanders making up the bulk of the house, plus the corn-fed Midwesterners and Japanese tourists glad to be at this first half of Tony Kushner's seven-hour "Gay Fantasia," the hottest thing for two seasons running, yielded up the desired information as cheerfully as if they were doing a painless good deed. "Where," for example, "do you currently reside?" Followed by: "Please indicate which of the following factors or sources of influence you were aware of regarding *Angels in America*, and then the degree each factor was influential to your decision" to come. Tony Award for Best Play of 1993? Of 1994? Personal recommendation? Advertising?

Only after the mainly straight audience finished complying, and the ushers, at least one of them wearing a *yarmulke*, gathered the data, would the lights be killed.

One of the few audience members not cooperating, I was musing instead about the life, times, and work of a long-dead playwright as I waited. That playwright was Arthur Schnitzler, who used to be mentioned in the same breath as his fellow turn-of-the-century Jewish Viennese trailblazers: Theodor Herzl, Sigmund Freud, Gustav Mahler. But today, if Schnitzler's name rings any bell at all in pre-millennial America, it is as the author of *Dance in a Circle*, and this because a harmless travesty of his play entitled *La Ronde* was filmed in 1950 by Max Ophuls.

The idea of *Dance in a Circle/La Ronde* is fairly uncomplicated—The Prostitute meets The Soldier meets The Housemaid meets The Young Gentleman, and so on, the before-and-after dialogues of ten loveless heterosexual couplings up and down the social pyramid until with The Count and The Prostitute we are back again where we started. The copulations are never enacted on stage, needless to say, but only indicated with blackouts. Among the post-copulatory exchanges:

THE ACTRESS: Count, you have done me a great honor.

THE COUNT: I kiss your hand, *Fraulein.*

Probably few Americans who saw *Hello Again*, a short-lived musical by Michael John LaChiusa Off-Broadway recently, knew that his daisy chain of gay and lesbian brief encounters was modeled on the same little Schnitzler play which first was banned and then, when put on, caused riots in Vienna and Berlin. Of course, the situation today is different in both those cities. There, unlike here, Schnitzler is well enough known, although it is an open question how much of his popularity is on account of his various works and how much due to nostalgia for a culture and its makers run out of town or exterminated by the grandparents of today's Viennese and Berliners themselves.

WAS there anyone bending over a questionnaire in the Walter Kerr who did not know that *Angels* is the great AIDS play? Hard to imagine, even of the visitors from Osaka. As for Schnitzler and his contemporaries, they had something else to worry about. Public-health statistics a century ago were not what they are today; nevertheless, the overall incidence of syphilis in the capital of the Hapsburg empire in 1895 was probably between 15 and 30 percent.

"He who knows syphilis," William Osler had declared, "knows medicine." In other words, because the infection could hide for years before exploding in any organ of the body, and could impersonate diseases from mononucleosis to ringworm, it seemed the disease of diseases, the master disease. The filthy part, for Victorians, was its principal mode of transmission, and the hid-

EDWARD NORDEN is writing a book about the future of the Jews. His articles in COMMENTARY include "Jerusalem—What Next?" (January 1994) and "Yes and No to the Holocaust Museums" (August 1993). The present article has been sponsored by the Harry Elson COMMENTARY Fund.

* Both *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*, Part 2, closed in New York last month, but a national tour is being planned.

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eous part, for anyone, was that mothers-to-be infected their unborn children.

Fifty years later, Stefan Zweig, a famous Jewish humanist and pacifist in his day, would write in his memoirs of Vienna:

> To the fear of infection was added the horror of the disgusting and degrading forms of the erstwhile cures. . . . For weeks on end the entire body of anyone infected with syphilis was rubbed with mercury, the effect of which was that the teeth fell out and other injuries to health ensued. The unhappy victim of a severe encounter felt himself not only physically but spiritually spotted, and even after so horrible a cure, he could never be certain that the cunning virus might not at any moment awake from its captivity and paralyze the limbs from the spine, or soften the brain.

Never in his many plays on the ways of heterosexuality in a bad society does Schnitzler more than very fleetingly hint at syphilis. Himself a doctor and a doctor's son, a Jew in terrifically anti-Semitic Vienna, the playwright had enough on his hands without breaking the VD taboo, *à la* Ibsen uniquely in *Ghosts*. It would have been very unwise for him to lay out how each character in the dance could well have infected the next, as foolish as it would have been to dig into the interconnected subjects of homosexuality, treason, and hatred of Jews in the upper reaches of the army of the emperor.

Schnitzler was brave, not crazy. As it was, he was put down as a decadent Jew for these sex plays, and as a pacifist traitor for his treatment of the near-holy institution of dueling. There was really nothing of the demon about Schnitzler, as there certainly was about his Viennese contemporaries Karl Kraus, the gemlike Jewish anti-Semite, or about the ineffable Otto Weininger, dead at twenty-three by his own hand—or, for that matter, as there was about Strindberg or Wedekind or Ibsen. The feeling about his plays, even when they climax in suicide as they often do, is sadder than it is tragic. A Schnitzler play is nicely-made, deceptively casual, oppressive rather than shattering. His virtues are those of rationality, detachment, humaneness: the perishable virtues of a doctor, with a strong dash of wit and implicit loathing for bourgeois hypocrisy thrown in.

But this did not keep his public or his enemies from misunderstanding him with a vengeance. That public, Schnitzler's core hometown audience flocking to what it liked to think were his amoral sex plays, was mostly Jewish. As Zweig was to remember: "The Jewish bourgeoisie . . . were the real audience, they filled the theaters." This audience was not especially interested in treatments of the anti-Semitism it tried to live with, and Schnitzler, having a good enough instinct for self-preservation, brought the topic up on stage only once, in *Professor Bernhardi*. Since (in contrast to Freud) he loved Vienna more than he hated it, one might say it was a good thing he died in 1931, seven years before a certain syphilophobic ex-tramp rode back into the city to the joy of that majority of its citizens which had always thought Schnitzler and his kind were dirty wreckers.

In *Mein Kampf*, without naming Schnitzler or any other writer, Hitler had labeled the Viennese theater of his youth "trashy . . . awful . . . unclean . . . obscene." Summed up the Nazi paper *Der Völkischer Beobachter* on Schnitzler's death: "Refined Jewish decadence."

SHOWTIME finally on West 48th Street. The curtain goes up on a white-bearded hasidic rabbi, played by an actress. So intensively has *Angels in America* been publicized that the only revelations are going to be seemingly minor touches like this one, plus the feel of the production, including the currents passing back and forth between stage and audience.

Projected over the stage is the date of Act 1: October-November 1985. The bearded woman stands next to a coffin draped with a Star of David. In an unconvincing Yiddish accent, she (he?) is eulogizing one Sarah Ironson:

> . . . not a person but a whole kind of person, the ones who crossed the ocean, who brought with us to America the villages of Russia and Lithuania—and how we struggled, and how we fought, for the family, for the Jewish home, so that you would not grow up *here*, in this strange place, in the melting pot where nothing melted. Descendants of this immigrant woman, you do not grow up in America, you and your children and their children with their *goyische* names. You do not live in America. No such place exists. Your clay is the clay of some Litvak *shtetl*, your air the air of the steppes—because she carried the old world on her back across the ocean, in a boat, and she put it down on Grand Concourse Avenue, or in Flatbush, and she worked that earth into your bones, and you pass it to your children, this ancient, ancient culture and home.

To repeat: the audience to whom Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz addresses himself (herself) as to the family of the deceased is three-fourths suburban-Jewish. But on the whole this audience does not seem to understand how to take him (her) or the speech. As irony? As camp? As given? But this opening note will turn out to have been struck deliberately, for both the veil of ambiguity and the Jewish element are going to figure throughout both parts of the marathon *Angels*.

The very next scene gives us the excellent F. Murray Abraham as the late Roy Cohn, working the phones while tempting a young blond Mormon law clerk named Joe Pitt to take a job at the Justice Department in order to help block Cohn's disbarment. It is first-class *shtick*. By ten minutes into *Millennium Approaches*, several things have

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been established: a rapid-fire, high-decibel campy wisecracking performance style which the audience usually manages to love; the widest possible terms of reference on the part of the playwright, Tony Kushner; and the aura of some kind of existential affinity between gayness and Jewishness, at least today's native American Jewishness.

On this last point: if the devilish Cohn with his Yiddishisms will provide the most delectable moments of two long evenings out, another chief thread of a very tangled plot is introduced when the lead character, Louis Ironson, after the funeral service for his grandmother, is overwhelmed by the sight of his Wasp lover's first lesion. Will Louis ditch Walter Prior? Or will he be a *mentsh* and stay? The great play of AIDS is also going to be Jewish, in its way.

So what else is new? Though Kushner is more ambitious than his predecessors, his "fantasia" is but the latest in a tidal wave of homosexual New York plays by Jewish sons, going back almost a quarter-century.

True, not all the gay plays of the past 25 years have been written by Jews. An incomplete list of the nots would include Mart Crowley's pioneering *The Boys in the Band*; the works of Terrence McNally; David Drake's *The Night Larry Kramer Kissed Me*; *T-Shirts* by Robert Patrick; *Fifth of July* by Lanford Wilson; and the late Robert Chesley's raunchy *Jerker, or The Helping Hand* and his *Night Sweat*, the first AIDS play.

However, when in the Roaring 70's a new industry of unmasked, self-respecting, innocent, or agitational homosexual plays, based in Greenwich Village but with Shubert Alley in its crosshairs, was founded, this was done mainly by writers of Jewish extraction doing nothing to pass.

There was, for instance, *Passing By*, a 1972 Off-Broadway work by Martin Sherman. The new innocence and naturalness here are such that when Toby gives Simon hepatitis, they savor being ill together, getting well, and splitting, no hard feelings and close to none of the usual suicidal impulses. Toby is given to exclaiming, "Feh!" Sherman's equally didactic *Bent* (1979) has Max, a prisoner at Dachau, exchanging his yellow star for a pink triangle before walking into the electrified fence. *Bent* made it to Broadway, where the *Times*'s Walter Kerr found it "strong."

Harvey Fierstein also carried the message of gay self-acceptance uptown to the straight audiences, first in his *Torch Song Trilogy*, then in the smash drag musical for which he wrote the book, *La Cage Aux Folles* (1983). His Arnold Beckoff in *Trilogy* is a vulnerable, feisty queen in love with Ed, a bisexual Gentile who is unwilling, at first anyway, to leave his wife.

Among the memorable scenes in *Trilogy*, which first played downtown in 1978, is one where Arnold is penetrated anally in the orgy room of a bar while keeping up his patter and smoking a cigarette. The scene is played in the dark but is supposed to have nothing grim about it. Even his mother, "the Rita Hayworth of Brighton Beach," finally has to accept Arnold for what he is, the avatar of an overdue change in our society. Fierstein himself, in the role of Arnold, netted Tonys for both best play and best actor when the show moved to Broadway in 1982. There it joined *Falsettos* by William Finn and James Lapine, a tale in *Sprechstimme* of a New York husband and father, Marvin, who leaves his wife and child for the half-Jewish, very athletic Whizzer.

None of these Jewish-homosexual plays, where *kvetching* is in and self-loathing and menace out, is dramatically in the same league as Crowley's *The Boys in the Band*, not to mention closeted works like Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* or Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* They are, *Bent* included, more akin to second-rate cabaret, with or without music, and the Jewish element never goes much beyond the simple matter of fact and a certain domesticated style. But they served a vital function in the rise of the "crossover" play. Broadway producers ascertained that straight audiences would shell out, not to patronize or sneer at but to empathize with uncloseted stage gays who bled a little when pricked a little, and laughed when tickled.

So long, that is, as the "life-style" of gay liberation was not depicted too realistically. The cocaine snorting and no-tomorrow sadomasochistic orgying, down to which liberation was boiling, and which the Jewish writer-activist Larry Kramer fixed with disapproving eye in his in-group novel *Faggots* (1978), did not travel uptown. What traveled, and began disarming the general culture, was the schmaltzy version which Jewish boys were better at cooking up than *goyim*.

It therefore was not so astonishing that when the AIDS virus crashed the party, and a different type of crossover play had to be written, it turned out even more "Jewish" than before. The AIDS dramas by Jews which have come out so far, and which *Angels* epitomizes while aiming to transcend, make a genre topical as the obituary page, stylized as the Passion plays of Oberammergau.

Always the scene is Manhattan. The homosexual couple nearly always consists of a Jew and a Gentile, and conventionally the Gentile is the one who falls ill. (Exceptions: the suicide Reuben in Jean-Claude van Itallie's *Ancient Boys*; the interfaith lovers in Fierstein's *Safe Sex*, both frightened but neither yet sick; the yuppies Peter and Drew in Richard Greenberg's *Eastern Standard*, both of indeterminate ethnicity.) Will the Jewish partner in the conventional scheme obey the golden rule? Or will he run? From this problem springs the genre's dramatic tension, such as it is, beginning with the problematical Larry Kramer's own *The Normal Heart* (1985).

In that play, the emotional Ned Weeks, Kra-

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mer's alter ego, does stick by the dying Felix. In fact, they "marry" in the final scene in the hospital. In *As Is* by William Hoffman (also 1985), Saul not only tells Rich, "I'll be here for you no matter what happens," but in the last hospice scene climbs into bed with him, albeit behind a drawn curtain. Likewise in the 1990 sequel to *Falsettos* entitled *Falsettoland*, set in a time when "something very bad is happening"; there, Marvin not only comforts the dying Whizzer but is joined by his understanding ex-wife, her new shrink husband, and the lesbian neighbors for the bar mitzvah of the son, performed as a rousing finale around the hospital bed. No second thoughts, no true irony, no bad feelings.

By 1993 and *Jeffrey*, whose author is the self-described "nice Jewish boy" Paul Rudnick, it was predictable that the talkative, brave, sensitive, HIV-negative hero, fearfully pledged to abstinence and transparently disguised as a Roman Catholic, would see the light and go with buff, HIV-positive Steve. In short, when Felix, Rich, Whizzer, and Steve die, Ned, Saul, Marvin, and Jeffrey are going to have the right, the moral right, to publish their names in the obituary notices as loyal companions.

What about Louis Ironson? This is a question that remains unanswered for most of the combined 420 minutes of *Angels*.

> Louis is a *shmendrick*. He is given to such talk as
>
> *Jeane Kirkpatrick* for God's sake will go on and on about freedom, when she talks about it, or human rights; you have Bush talking about human rights . . . these people don't begin to know what, ontologically, freedom is. . . . And what I think is that what AIDS shows us is the limits of tolerance.

The question whether Louis will stand by Walter Prior, his Wasp lover, and then whether, having abandoned him, he will be allowed to return, is one of three plots set in motion in *Millennium Approaches* and clumsily developed into the year 1986 in Part 2, *Perestroika*. Intersecting this is the story of Joe Pitt, the closeted Mormon Reaganite living in Brooklyn, his psychotically heterosexual wife, and his mother who flies in from Salt Lake City attempting to save the marriage after Louis guesses Joe's true nature. Third and foremost is the story, and presence, of Roy Cohn as quintessential McCarthyite and gay-bashing New York closet homosexual *macher*.

As biographies by Sidney Zion and Nicholas von Hoffman tell us, the real-life Cohn during his final months was indeed preoccupied with escaping disbarment, and was indeed claiming to be dying of something other than the gay disease. In *Angels*, when informed by the doctor that he has AIDS, he replies: "Homosexuals are not men who sleep with other men. Homosexuals are men who . . . have zero clout." Hence it is not possible for Cohn to have AIDS. This by-now famous line is one of Kushner's inventions.

Another is the ghost of the atom spy Ethel Rosenberg, who shows up at Cohn's hospital deathbed to taunt him for his role in the prosecution of her and her husband Julius more than 30 years before. Still another is the trademarked angel, descending over Walter Prior's bed with the words: "Greetings Prophet!" to close Part 1.

The sequel has Prior saying, "Maybe I am a prophet. Not just me, all of us who are dying now." During this evening he is befriended by the mother of Joe Pitt; Joe leaves his wife for Louis and refuses to help Cohn; Joe is left by Louis, who is guilt-ridden over having abandoned Prior. Cohn is ejected from the bar and noisily dies, the very sick Prior wrestles the angel for a blessing, curses God during a visit to heaven for "all the terrible days of this terrible century," and in an epilogue dated 1990 apparently has permitted Louis to return to keep him company.

Dramatically, *Angels* is much wind-up, little delivery. The play's champions have touted its grab-bag formlessness as itself definitively American, and it is true that everything including the kitchen sink gets in before the final curtain, giving the impression not only of expansiveness but even of a tolerant ambiguity on religion and unbelief, selfishness and loyalty, Right and Left. Even those puzzled by the seeming chaos get a lot for their money. Both evenings move along, thanks to director George C. Wolfe, to much stage business, and especially to the character of Roy Cohn—a Jewish monster beyond good and evil.

Cohn is the only really interesting figure in *Angels*, the only nontype. An anti-*shmendrick*, the opposite of Louis, he runs away with the show. Louis, meanwhile, is Kushner's alter ego, a gay, hyper, Jewish liberal-radical tripped up only occasionally by a hospital nurse, a flaming black queen with a perfect ear and great campy lines.

Although he blathers a great deal, and is sometimes a hypocritical coward, Louis's politics and sexual behaviors are, as far as Kushner is concerned, and we are supposed to concur, right on. The general rule in this play is that Kushner's ambiguities are quite studied—one understands where the playwright stands. A single lapse in the park aside, Louis could not be wiser or more generous sexually, as when he rescues Mormon Joe from the closet and they finally get together on the Lower East Side, the same neighborhood, Louis does not fail to say, where "the Jews lived when they first arrived." Joe has come to him but still hesitates. Louis is gently implacable. "Sometimes," he reassures the uptight conservative lawyer, "even if it scares you to death, you have to be willing to break the law." Kushner's stage directions: "Louis slips his hand down the front of Joe's pants . . . Louis pulls his hand out, smells

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and tastes his fingers, and then holds them for Joe to smell."

RAPT silences from the dark side of the footlights alternate with hurricanes of friendly laughter throughout *Angels*. Thus, when actor Dan Futterman as Louis elaborately follows the stage directions here, the audience is captivated. And no one has earlier protested, much less rioted, when Louis kneels, spotlighted, pants down, to be taken by a Central Park stranger in leather. "Infect me," he says not very wisely. "I don't care."

But that is the weak Louis. The strong Louis is the one who leads Joe with a firm hand out of the wilderness of heterosexual marriage into the promised land of homosexual lovemaking.

> LOUIS: I don't believe in God. I think you should know that before we fuck again.

To which Joe, with him in bed, responds, "I love you."

No one makes a demonstrative exit from the theater during this scene, either. Or any other. A collective intake of breath for the naked, wasted Christ-like body of Prior (Stephen Spinella) with its painted-on sores. Laughter for the punch-line when Louis asks Isidor Chemelwitz: "Rabbi, what does the Holy Writ say about someone who abandons someone he loves at a time of great need?"

> RABBI: . . . You want to confess, better you should find a priest.
>
> LOUIS: But I'm not a Catholic, I'm a Jew.
>
> RABBI: Worse luck for you, bubbelah. Catholics believe in forgiveness. Jews believe in guilt.

Or again, when his baffled, earnest, desperate wife is telling Joe about her day: "I heard on the radio how to give a blow job. . . . It was a little Jewish lady with a German accent." A tremendous knowing shriek, no one pausing to wonder how Dr. Ruth's size can be inferred from the radio.

And delight for the burning letters of the Hebrew alphabet, part of the stage design. Readers of the Sunday *New York Times* entertainment section have been instructed by Kushner that

> Hebrew is a language of great antiquity and mystery, and of great compression. Each letter, each word encompasses innumerable meanings, good and evil. The physical letters are themselves totems, objects of power. The Torah, the Book, is to be treated with veneration. Here is another Mormon-Jewish connection: both are people of the Book—only very different books.

If anyone in the theater thinks Kushner treats either the Jewish or the Mormon book with less than veneration, and is upset by that, he keeps it to himself. More laughter for a diorama at the Mormon visitors' center, where Joe's mother drags his wife. And the hugest laugh of all, for this:

> BELIZE [THE BLACK QUEEN]: Guess who just checked in with the troubles? The Killer Queen Herself. New York's number-one closeted queer.
>
> PRIOR: *Koch*?

The laughter has a more knowing edge to it than at *Millennium Approaches*. This is because, although suburban Jews predominate on both evenings, a much larger cohort of with-it Manhattan gays shows up for *Perestroika*. No doubt all have already seen Part 1, and every bit of camp is picked up instantly. But more ghosts hover during Evening Two than Evening One. These are the spirits of the youngish men, often beautiful to look at, sometimes gifted, who died piteously in the past decade, just as some in the audience who knew, loved, abandoned, were unfaithful or faithful to, and nursed and wept over them know they also will die in the next decade unless a cure is found. The air especially at Evening Two is consequently shot through with grief, dread, and bravely stylish good humor, with sentiments of community, and also of resentment of something out there in America.

The mood, improbably, embraces the dying Roy Cohn as well. Throughout Part 2, anticipation of the next scene with him offsets incipient longueurs.

> ROY: I don't trust this hospital. For all I know Lillian fucking *Hellman* is down in the basement switching the pills around.

A thunderclap of laughter. "I pleaded till I wept to put her in the chair," Cohn tells Joe. "Her" is Ethel Rosenberg again, whose ghost, like the Commendatore's in *Don Giovanni*, materializes to say, "Be seeing you soon, Roy. Julius sends his regards. . . . History is about to crack wide open." Having enjoyed him, the audience relishes Cohn's writhing exit quite as much as does Ethel, whom Kushner has say: "I came to forgive but all I can do is take pleasure in your misery. . . . And when you die all anyone will say is: better he had never lived at all."

What follows is probably as definitive a first on Broadway as the mimed sodomy earlier. Asked by the black nurse to do the right thing and say kaddish over the body, Louis is willing but ignorantly unable. Whereupon the shade of Ethel Rosenberg, played by the same actress who did the hasidic rabbi, intones the entire Aramaic prayer, Louis with a Kleenex on his head stumbling behind. You can hear a pin drop.

The epilogue, set at the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park, with its stone angel, has the ill but surviving Prior, Louis, the black queen, and Joe's mother, all reconciled. "This disease," Prior says to the audience in an envoi shedding the last veil of ambiguity and reminiscent of Clifford Odets at his agitprop best, "will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all, and the dead will be commemorated and will struggle on with the living,

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and we are not going away . . . *MORE LIFE* . . . The Great Work Begins."

Triggering a long stormy ovation and many curtain calls and leaving the dense and the unconverted to figure out what it all means.

JEWISH homosexuals, famous and obscure, there have always been, including those who in the bad old days found ways to live unrepressed. The composer Ned Rorem, a non-Jew, tells in his memoirs of going home with one Morris Golde, "a brash, short, swarthy, muscular presence" from the Bronx, in prehistoric 1943. Later Rorem, who estimates having gone to bed with 3,000 men and several women, refers to "unsentimentally" obliging the anarchist poet-philosopher Paul Goodman, who "smelled of his baggy sweater and pipe smoke."

But this is old stuff. The art, fashion, music, publishing, and theater scenes were known by those who knew anything to be disproportionately Jewish and importantly gay many decades before Tony Kushner. Often enough, as in the Aaron Copland-Leonard Bernstein-Marc Blitzstein set, to which Rorem as a non-Jew won only partial entrée, the attributes of Jewishness and gayness overlapped, and were spiced by political fellow-traveling. The phenomenon is not new. The extent perhaps is.

Has the number of Jewish homosexuals taken a quantum leap, or is the increase simply apparent, the result of the closet having been vacated? Any bitterly unmarried, straight, non-Orthodox Jewish woman in the New York area yearning to marry in the faith and have children probably believes she can answer that one. It is not just that the closet is not what it used to be, she will tell you. No, the gay life has become positively fashionable among her generation of male Jews, and the absolute number of Jewish homosexuals has gone through the roof.

Here we enter uncharted territory. All the experts say that no matter what the group, and regardless of time and place, of repression or liberation, the ratio of men preferring men to those preferring women stays constant, and statistically minuscule. But what, our childless Jewish woman lawyer with a brother in the Village might ask, do they know? If the experts are right, how can it be that on any given Friday night, there may well be more worshippers at Beth Simchat Torah, the gay and lesbian *shul* downtown, than at any other synagogue or temple in the Diaspora? Go to the West Village after services on Friday night and see all these Jewish men having dinner with each other in candlelit Italian restaurants!

Don't get her wrong, she will add: a basher of homosexuals is the last thing she is. She retains a Jewish heart, she can't help admiring their stylish courage—her brother, thank God, remains HIV-negative. Moreover, her work takes her to other cities, where she has discovered smaller islands of the gay archipelago boasting a high percentage of Jews and has been told how these are raising property values in neighborhoods formerly given over to blight. Nevertheless, she's unhappy. She has the money, but not the time, for *Angels*.

Behind her and her frustration, and her brother, loom their parents, and one does not want to get her going on them. But there are many like her, you cannot avoid them unless you have nothing to do with Jewish women, and unless you pin everything on genetics; this raises a double question: has the American Jewish family of the last generation, a family more and more often with the father vanished, become a nursery for homosexual sons? And why have the many playwrights among them, with the exception of the intrepid Larry Kramer, shunned the family topic as if *it* were the real plague?

KRAMER'S *The Destiny of Me* (1992) is a sequel to *The Normal Heart*. In that first play, his *nudnik* of an alter ego, Ned Weeks, says, "We have simply fucked ourselves silly for years and years, and sometimes we've done it in the filthiest places." Now his Gentile lover has died, Ned himself is sick, and it is time to remember in a series of flashbacks what the playwright calls his own "journey to acceptance" of gayness. This means unearthing himself as a boy, unearthing his parents, and later the shrinks with names like Schwartz and Grossman who tried to "cure" him.

The Destiny of Me, like *The Normal Heart*, reveals that Kramer is no dramatist—his primary subject is himself, and he cannot get much distance from it. But at least he rummages openly in the past, agonizing over what he finds—something the ideology frowns on. It turns out Ned Weeks's father was hated by his artistic son, while the smothering mother was adored.

Ideological homosexuals were bound to give *The Destiny of Me* tepid reviews, despite Kramer's political standing as founder of ACT-UP. This dwelling on childhood and parents, like his earlier sermonizing against promiscuity, is extremely incorrect. It raises doubts whether he has truly told Drs. Schwartz and Grossman to go to hell. Much better for gay playwrights to leave childhood and puberty, mom and especially dad strictly out of their work.

This has so far been done by Tony Kushner, although he has confessed in one of numberless interviews that his own coming-out initiated "a family battle," and that his father took much longer to adjust than his mother, doing so only when *Angels* struck gold. In the play, Louis Ironson of course has parents and siblings—they are present in front of Rabbi Chemelwitz at the funeral of the grandmother. Explaining to Prior why he never visited this old lady at her nursing home, Louis says: "She looked too much like my mother."

And that is all, in seven hours, concerning his

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family. "Vast, sprawling, inclusive, wordy," Michael Feingold gushed in his review of *Angels* in the *Village Voice*. But while Ma Pitt comes on at length, and her deceased professional soldier husband, Joe's father, is thoroughly dissected, the Ironsons are kept out of sight and mind. Besides sparing Kushner's own family, this makes dramatic and ideological sense. The dramatic interest in *Angels* is Cohn, and the ideological message is that AIDS is more than a disease and that a homosexual perspective best comprehends reality and history. Bringing in Louis's family would have jeopardized everything.

In fact, in the beginning, *Angels* was to be a play about Cohn. The attractions for an ideological gay like Kushner are self-evident. What less obviously yet also compellingly makes Cohn's last days almost too good to be true is that he was such an anti-Communist.

Born three years after the Rosenbergs were electrocuted, Kushner is something of a red-diaper baby. Anyone with a nose in these matters can sniff it from *Angels*, but the playwright has come entirely clean in a credo published recently in—where else?—the *Nation*. It reads like nothing so much as one of Louis's expostulations. If American "capitalism" were to accommodate homosexuals by giving them equal rights, as it has every capability of doing, and if that were that, this in Kushner's eyes would be a tragedy. What profit from the struggle if gays end up with the same rights as heteros while the "free market" goes on savaging the world?

> Poverty, war, alienation, environmental destruction, colonialism, unequal development, boom/bust cycles, private property, individualism, commodity fetishism, the fetishization of the body, the fetishization of violence, guns, drugs, child abuse, underfunded and bad education (itself a form of child abuse)—these things are key to the successful functioning of the free market.

Homosexuals like Andrew Sullivan of the *New Republic* who are satisfied with tolerance are put down by Kushner as "assimilationists." This is quite a dirty word in some Jewish lexicons—but Kushner's teacher is neither Herzl nor any *rebbe*. It is Oscar Wilde, the preceptor of socialism with a gay face, "a socialism of the skin."

THE notion that decadence is in the eye of the beholder, no more than an epithet for anything new in a culture which is feared by reactionaries, is always beguiling. "Decadence," said the critic Richard Gilman back in the 70's, in much the same words the ordinary professor of communications would use today, "is not a fact but a value judgment"—a judgment passed on the most forward-looking, actually the best, healthiest, most useful artists of the day. As for sex, conservatives always get hung up on this, naively or cynically identifying the sex in "decadent" art with paganism, and paganism with social breakdown.

To this, the straight butch lesbian Camille Paglia has entered a ringing plea of guilty: "Judeo-Christianity never did defeat paganism, which still flourishes in art, eroticism, astrology, and pop culture." According to Paglia, the eternal hallmark of decadence is the celebration of sexual perversion; and such decadence, long may it wave, continues to be with us because Christianity failed to destroy paganism, including "all theater, which is pagan showiness."

Paglia exaggerates. Not merely the celebration of perversion but blanket approval of the instincts and the love of death are what you have in truly pagan theater, and what you do not have in Shakespeare, Jonson, Chekhov, Schnitzler, Beckett, etc. Nevertheless, when Paglia vouches for a culture war going back 2,000 or 4,000 years and continuing into the future, attention should be paid. And we might remember, too, that Gore Vidal, saluted by Kushner as his mentor, has identified the great enemy today as homophobic monotheism. If such as Paglia and Vidal not only acknowledge paganism, but affirm the life-enhancing qualities of a pagan consciousness which squares, conservatives, and Bible-thumpers call decadent, where does Kushner's play fit in?

He implies the answer in his interviews—*Angels* is a play of gay ideology. Professors of that ideology agree that if straights are to be reeducated, their noses are going to have to be rubbed in it. They must be forced to look, not only at males kissing, but at the act itself, sex being the essence of this yet-to-be-fully-accepted way of life. "Sexual desire," states John Clum, a member of the deconstructionist and neo-Marxian English department at Duke, "is not the only dimension of the homosexual experience, but it is the core." To assert gay pride, and desensitize the heteros into acceptance, the lineaments of that desire gratifying itself have to be made visible. Among the beauties of *Angels* for Clum is that here, it happens.

But homosexual agitprop must not only render the gay way nonobjectionable. On this Clum is a more honest ideologue than Kushner. "In the past twenty years," writes the former, "homosexuality in drama has moved from shame-filled hints to proud assertion. Heterosexism, which used to be upheld as the norm, is now driven offstage." In other words, in order to accept gayness, the straight has to be led to the realization that his own way is a not-so-good one. Neither a good way of sex, nor a good way of imagining, of seeing and being in the world.

The ideology propagated directly by academics like Clum and indirectly by Kushner avows that imagination and sexuality grow one from the other, and that a distinctively homosexual imagination possesses the future. Gays, when free, *see* more clearly, powerfully, and inclusively than

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straights. No crossover play will do the job unless it sends the audience home with this new understanding. *Angels* is especially fine, says Clum, because it "challenges the heterosexuals . . . to see with gay eyes."

What Clum somehow misses is that Kushner goes farther. He does to AIDS what Arthur Schnitzler, M.D. would never have dreamed of doing to any illness, let alone syphilis—he metaphorizes it. AIDS is shown as ghastly, but Prior comes to believe that having it endows him with the faculty of prophecy, is evidence of some kind of grace for "all of us who are dying now." And nothing believed in by this brave, together Wasp is to be dismissed by us.

It would be nice to know how many of those flocking to *Angels,* straights and for that matter homosexuals alike, buy the prophecy of a gay millennium. But one does not need an audience poll to feel that, ideological though *Angels* is, it is not, finally, pagan. A *New Yorker* profile reports that Kushner keeps a teddy bear among his possessions, and that seems right. Mimed homosexual acts notwithstanding, the fascination with Cohn notwithstanding, this play, like others of the genre, has a basically soft and cuddly, not a hard and Greco-Roman, feel about it.

HOWEVER, *Variety* reports that the master director Robert Altman is bringing *Angels* to the screen. The Kushnerian view of America, sex, and the Jews is thus soon going to be available to the masses, and no doubt with its squishiness taken care of. At every multiplex where *Schindler's List* played last year, Americans will be offered the adventures of Roy, Louis, Joe, Prior, Ethel & Co., probably excluding the sodomy but including subtitled Yiddish, burning Hebrew letters, the f-word every 30 seconds, lesions, and kaddish, the whole *megillah* artistically riveting. Will the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences have the intestinal fortitude to bestow on the Altman version the Oscars guaranteeing it long, profitable, influential runs? Hard to say.

Uncertain, too, given this country's irritable mood, is the popular reception awaiting the movie when it opens. It is not inconceivable that at some malls the clean-cut will be out picketing what they apprehend is the brilliant glorification of pagan decadence. Should this happen, the ACLU will cite the First Amendment, while Jewish defense organizations, known among other things for their dutiful advocacy of gay rights, abortion-on-demand, and sex education, and for their reasoned opposition to prayer in school, will see no need but to keep mum.

For here is a salient difference between Europe in 1895 and our uniquely forgiving country 100 years later: Godfearing Christians, even the Puritans and the worse-than-uptight among them, those for whom AIDS is retribution from heaven, do not, whatever they mutter among themselves, publicly blame "the Jews" for anything. The ancient hateful conflation of homos, atheists, feminists, abortionists, Communists, and Jews is limited to the remoter gulches of Idaho that harbor the likes of the Aryan Nation. Everywhere else it is, and one hopes it will remain, beyond the American pale.

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Alexandria on My Mind

André A. Aciman

PEOPLE in the street in Alexandria called her *al-tarsha*, the deaf woman. Among the Arabs in the marketplace, everyone and everything in her household was known in relation to her: the deaf woman's father, the deaf woman's house, maid, bicycle, car, husband. The motorcycle on which she had won an exhibition race on the Corniche in the early 40's, and which was later sold to a neighbor, continued to be known as the *tarsha*'s *mutusikl*. When I was old enough to walk alone on the street, I discovered that I too was known as the *tarsha*'s son.

Sometimes, on seeing me, street vendors, shopkeepers, or those idling about the cafés would discreetly raise an index finger to their ear. They were talking about my mother. But they might just as easily have pointed at their temples, for many confused the deaf with the insane. She had screamed at nearly all of them, and everyone knew her temper.

Some forgave and pitied her, with the languid kindness of the Middle East. Others mocked her voice, the discordant, grating voice of the deaf, adding twisted faces to twisted hand signals to look like gargoyles or village idiots. One day, in a crowded grocery shop, my mother caught a young Egyptian mimicking her speech. She could not tell what he was saying, but she recognized the insolent gaze as he smirked at her, all the while looking over toward his friends. She stopped whatever she was doing, told me to stay by the cash register, and without giving the young man time to blink, slapped him twice on the face, very hard. Then, before he could recover, she grabbed him by the head, threw him to the ground, and proceeded to beat him up, first with her fist, then with anything that came her way.

My grandmother, when she heard of the incident, grumbled to her son, my father, that his wife behaved no better than the Arabs among whom she had grown up. "How will he"—she meant me—"ever learn the right way to act if all he hears is her deaf yammering and constant brawling?" Discharging a torrent now that she had spilled a few drops, she went on: "In less than two months we'll be celebrating my mother's centennial, and I want him to know how to behave there. I don't want to introduce Madame Lord or Victoria Coutzeris to the son of a Jewish *tarsha*, understand?"

The next morning, my grandmother informed my mother that she wanted to take me under her wing, the pretext being that I had been caught mispronouncing far too many words under the influence of my mother's deviant speech. She also wanted her to tell her deaf friends that they should curtail their visits, especially Aziza, a poor young woman who served as maid, cook's helper, cleaning lady, and seamstress, and was guilty, in my grandmother's eyes, of the twin crimes of being deaf *and* an "ignorant Arab."

She suggested I visit every other morning in Ibrahimieh, where she lived, and then have lunch with her at my great-grandmother's home. My mother, stunned by this proposition, which she had lip-read from her mother-in-law's face and gestures, fell silent, but I caught her pupils darting about, a sign of impatience and suppressed rage. "And what do I do while he's with you, darn socks with my deaf friends?" she finally burst out.

"Not at all. Oh, I didn't mean for you to take it like that at all, Gigi," replied my grandmother, beating a hasty retreat. "I just want the child to know my side of the family and hear polite conversation. He must learn how to speak correctly."

"But I already take him to my parents every day for that very purpose," protested my mother.

"That's very good, Gigi. Still, it's not quite the same thing," she said, raising her index finger. "I want him to become distinguished. Like my brothers, who are, as you know, *très comme il faut*."

When my father arrived home late that evening, the first thing he did was to show his extreme displeasure that Aziza was still there. It took my mother a second to piece together the puzzle.

"Is this going to end up with your mother taking care of him every other day?"

"Why not?" he replied, going on the offensive. "I don't want him growing up thinking he is either deaf or an Arab."

"Meanwhile, poor Aziza stayed later than usual to finish ironing your shirts." She flung open a cupboard and pointed to two stacks of neatly folded shirts.

ANDRÉ A. ACIMAN, who left his native Alexandria in 1965, teaches French literature at Princeton. His memoir, *Out of Egypt*, from which the present piece is taken, will be published later this month by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Other sections of the memoir that have appeared in COMMENTARY are "Soldier, Salesman, Swindler, Spy" (September 1991) and "Out of Egypt" (May 1990).

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"What do I care about shirts?" he shouted.

He picked one up, examined it as if looking for a crease, found none, then brought it close to his nose. He found what he was looking for.

"Here," he said, almost thrusting the shirt into my mother's face.

"It was washed this very morning," she said.

"Smell again! It stinks of *helba! helba! helba!*" he shouted as he picked up each shirt, sniffed it, and threw it on the floor. "Get rid of her!"

My father was right about one thing: Aziza always trailed that pungent odor of *helba*, an auburn-colored substance that Egyptians drank in large doses for its alleged curative properties and which dyed their palms red and made their bodies exude what Europeans considered a repellent, dirty odor. My father hated to find it trapped in his drawer, his linens, his food.

This odor was so unmistakable and so overwhelming that one could immediately distinguish Westernized Egyptians, who used very strong after-shave, from those who affected Western habits but whose minds, homes, and regimens were still steeped in the universe of *helba*. Even if an Egyptian had completely adopted Western ways, shed his native customs to become what my grandparents called an *évolué*, and wore a suit every day, learned table manners, kissed *mamselles*' hands in greeting, and knew his wines, his cheeses, and the required number of La Fontaine fables by heart, the fact that his clothes gave off the slightest trace of that telltale scent would make one think twice about his professed inclination for the West and suspect that not everyone in his household—himself included—had risen above the dark, sinister underside of Arab hygiene.

But there was another reason for my father's visceral aversion to *helba*. He, like his mother, disliked *all* kinds of recognizable ethnic odors, thinking that the more Westernized a family, the more odorless was its home, its clothes, its cooking. It would never have occurred to either of them that all homes bear ethnic odors, and that anyone born in Alexandria could easily have sniffed out a Sephardi household like ours, with its residual odor of Parmesan cheese, boiled artichokes, and *borekas*, just as easily as they themselves could recognize an Armenian kitchen by its unavoidable smell of cured pastrami, a Greek living room by the odor of myrrh, and Italians by the smell of fried onions and chamomile. Working-class Italians smelled of fried peppers, and Greeks smelled of garlic and brilliantine, and, when they sweated, their underarms smelled of yogurt.

Aziza originally belonged to a coterie of friends my mother had made while a student at Madame Tsotsou's boarding school for deaf girls. Under Madame Tsotsou's vigilant egalitarianism, no one was permitted to distinguish between rich and poor, Greek and Arab, and since none of the girls was allowed pocket money, there were also no privileges to be had, except for the occasional jar of marmalade whose contents were equitably spooned out to all in the dining room. The school was quite successful, and well-to-do pupils came from all around the Mediterranean with no other goal than to speak and behave like the hearing, preferably in French, and, through French, to free themselves from this terrible *corvée*, their burden of silence.

Among my mother's friends was another young woman, named Sophie, who came from a patrician Greek family that had lost everything in Smyrna and now retained only the vestiges of distinction in its obligatory afternoon tea where you could taste oversweetened Greek jams on a spoon. Sophie had married a Greek auto mechanic named Costa, a hairy, cocksure sailor-type with greasy hair and dirty fingernails who roared about Alexandria on his motorcycle on Sundays, sporting gold bracelets, a tank shirt, and his nymph, Sophie, on the back seat. Costa, who had the boisterous familiarity of Alexandrian Greeks, was a jack-of-all-trades dabbling in twenty more—an "impresario," he would say with a tiny wink, meaning a trader in stolen, black-market, and counterfeit goods.

The only person who took a liking to him was, of all people, my grandmother. "He's a true savage, but a heart of gold," she would say. Unbeknownst to my mother, Costa would often visit my grandmother and bring her presents, ranging from caviar and champagne to perfumes and *foie gras* hijacked from Beirut. In return, he asked nothing but the ear of an old woman who, he said, was like a mother to him and understood him far better than did his Sophie, who, during mating season—as he called it—could think of nothing better than to squeeze the pimples on his forehead. "Can a man live that way, madame? Tell me, can he?" he would ask, exasperation bubbling in his voice.

My grandmother had met Costa one evening just as he was arriving to pick up Sophie. Since the two of them were the only hearing people in the room, they began to talk and soon discovered that both were born in Constantinople. When she heard that he owned a motorcycle, and that he ran errands in Ibrahimieh every morning, I saw her give a start and say, "Achhh, *kyrio* Costa—" and then she begged him to bring me to her house. The man consented easily. In exchange, she recommended that he meet her brothers, who would certainly want to use his services.

Thus, every other morning, Monsieur Costa would arrive with the loudest motorcycle in the world. He would whistle with both fingers in his mouth, and, as soon as I was saddled, order me to hold him tight by the waist, and off we went, roaring through Sidi-Gaber, past Cleopatra, then Grand Sporting, racing with the tram, beating the tram, leaving the tram behind us, finally reaching Petit Sporting, and slowing down toward Ibrahimieh, all in a matter of minutes as he kept taking sharp and ever more intricate turns, veering

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left then right—growling "Hold tight, *pedimou*"—leaning as low as he could, his boot grazing the asphalt, always congratulating himself with "What reflexes, Costa, what reflexes!" speeding all the way out to Camp de César, almost to Chatby, and then turning back again toward Ibrahimieh—"for the fun of it"—and slowing the vehicle to the equivalent of a regal canter down Rue Memphis, finally depositing me in front of my grandmother's house, where she waited for me with a piece of fresh fruit already peeled and ready to be eaten as soon as I hopped off.

An hour into my visit, my grandmother would never fail to observe that I already looked much better. "Look, he's laughing," she would say to my grandfather as we sat around the table in the garden. "Isn't it true that he only laughs when he's with me?"

"Come, we'll take a walk around the garden," my grandfather would say, always eager to be away from his wife, taking me into the arbor where birds sang and where the air was thick with the parched, cloying scent of rosemary and sweet, overgrown rhododendron. Away from my grandmother's gaze, he would finally reach into his pocket and produce a present: a key chain, or a pen, or a penknife—our secret, he'd say, for she always disapproved of the things he gave me, claiming they were dangerous or unseemly. "Soon I'll have to teach you billiards," he said one day, producing three smooth ivory balls from his striped bathrobe pocket. They came, no doubt, from the billiard parlor he owned. Then, using his cane and a billiard cue, we would pluck guavas from one of the trees.

At around half past ten, my grandmother and I would hire a carriage and ride all the way to Stanley Beach where her siblings and her mother had a summer cabin.

At the beach, my great-aunts were persuaded they still lived in *fin-de-siècle* Alexandria, far from the world of querulous maids and crippled manservants. The women never put on bathing suits but wore white or cream-colored short-sleeved linen or cotton voile dresses with plenty of lace, and large, ornate hats, which they held in place with their hands whenever a breeze came up. There, all four sisters, their mother, friends, and Madame Victoria Coutzeris would sit on multicolored striped folding chairs, forever repeating how important it was to avoid the sun, heaving happy sighs whenever the wind stirred the large, striped umbrella.

I was never allowed to drink or eat anything, certainly not Coca-Cola or those hazelnut biscuits sold by grubby vendors along the sand. My grandmother insisted that nothing agreed with the sea more than fruit, and plenty of it, which is why she brought a thermos filled with lemonade. To my great joy, however, I found out that ice cream could be had simply by sneaking up one flight of stairs to the upper boardwalk where Aunt Flora had her cabin. There I would usually find her reading in a reclining beach chair. I would ask for ice cream and return, rather pleased with myself, to confront my angry grandmother, who stood waiting, like God after Adam had eaten the forbidden fruit.

Once, by chance, I found Aunt Flora sitting quietly next to my mother whom I did not immediately recognize. So great was my surprise and my sudden joy that I could not believe I hadn't come with her to the beach. She waited for me to finish my ice cream, then took me by the hand, went downstairs to greet her in-laws, and, with a tone of voice that admitted no discussion, said she was taking me home.

"But I had planned to take him to visit Albert at the billiard hall. We always stop there, don't we?" my grandmother asked, trying to enlist my help.

I nodded.

"No, he's coming with me," said my mother.

I thanked my good fortune that my mother had spared me a confrontation. But when my grandmother dried me off before dressing me in clean clothes, the silence between us was intolerable. I wished I had not been so visibly eager to leave her, for the old lady seemed on the verge of tears, and as she bent down to buckle my sandals, which must have been difficult for her, I knew that, given the chance to do it again, I would have forfeited the mango ice cream altogether and not run into my mother. I kissed her on the cheek, saying something I seldom said to her. I told her I loved her. But I said it in Arabic.

To placate his mother, my father personally took me to his parents' the next morning. But to satisfy my mother, he decided perhaps we didn't have to go to the beach. Instead, he suggested that he, his father, and I go to buy shoes at a closeout sale. We drove along the Corniche on this clear summer day, parked the car near the Cecil Hotel, and walked toward Boulevard Saad Zaghloul. There we stopped to take in the view and listen to the sound of the water licking the huge, ugly boulders lining the city's waterfront. There was a pause in the conversation.

"You know," said my grandfather turning to my father, "I don't think I need new shoes." And as though he hadn't been paying attention to his son, he added, "All this sky and all this water—what do you do with so much blue once you've seen it?"

My father changed his mind. "Perhaps we don't need ready-made shoes after all," he said, implying that he was rich enough now to afford custom-made ones. Instead, he suggested coffee at an establishment overlooking the bay. "I've had an excellent year. Things are going very well. I'm even building an annex to warehouse more goods. So I can afford a cup of coffee at La Côte."

"I don't understand," said my grandfather, as though talking to himself. "One day he's the im-

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poverished son of a pool-hall owner, and the next he's splurging on the best cars, best clothes, best this, best that. This can't go on. You're only doing well because all the other large textile manufacturers have sold their businesses and moved back to England. It doesn't bode well. You should be saving more."

"Both you and Gigi have only one thing in mind: save, save, save."

Meanwhile, we had reached La Côte and my father opened the heavy glass door, letting both of us in ahead of him. The place was crowded but almost silent.

The waiter, who recognized my father immediately, knew that he liked a table next to the window.

"You shouldn't be spending your money so frivolously. I'm not the first to say it." My grandfather was looking out the window. "The entire city knows. There are even rumors about other things as well, if you follow my drift."

"Your drift sticks out a mile."

My father picked up a cigarette, let it rest between his fingers as though trying to remember whether he hadn't already just smoked one, then, staring at it still, said, "You were hardly any better yourself."

"It's easy to accuse me. But I was married to a witch."

A waiter wearing a turban and traditional Egyptian garb poured coffee for the two men, while another, a Greek, brought me a large ice-cream soda.

The old man sighed. He looked at the table next to ours, where two women were drinking tea. "Look, don't think I don't know these things."

"But—" began to protest the son.

"Just promise me this," added my grandfather. "As long as I'm alive, be good to her, and no more women."

The son swore.

"And when you're gone?" he asked, trying to liven the mood.

"When I'm gone, I'll be gone, and what you do will be your business."

The waiter brought two large glasses of water and a tiny slice of Turkish delight.

"You know you shouldn't eat sweets," said my father. "My doctor—"

"Please!" interrupted his father. "Coffee, cigarettes, and sweets. I'm not even seventy, yet these are the two or three pleasures left me." He sipped the coffee, holding his demitasse and saucer in the same hand. "There," he interjected. He had already given me a piece of the Turkish delight and was cutting another.

My father, who was sitting across from us, had put down his demitasse, and was staring at us in silence, as though not wishing to break the spell.

MY FATHER knew it as soon as he picked up the receiver that same night. He immediately woke me, not, as he usually did, by sitting at the edge of my bed and whispering my name, but by tapping softly on my shoulder. A sense of cold, almost mechanical urgency seemed to govern each of his movements, as though he had been rehearsing this for years. He washed my face, dried it with swift, perfunctory dabbing motions, and got me dressed. He was not talking.

We drove in silence.

"You shouldn't have brought the boy," said my grandmother, tucking her crumpled handkerchief inside the left cuff of her shirt.

"I want my father to see him, and I want him to see my father."

Mother and son whispered.

It had happened after he came back from the pool hall.

"Who knows!" she said, biting the point of her diamond ring anxiously to keep herself from sobbing again. "I call it the pool hall in order not to call it other things. Do I know where he goes wandering late at night? He never tells me, I never ask." She was silent an instant. "He doesn't want to move. Doesn't even want to take his clothes off." When they finally took me in to see him, he was lying on his bed, still wearing his tie, jacket, and trousers. Only his shoes had been removed. His socks were too long for his feet and dangled past his toes.

As soon as he heard the door, he thought he was speaking to his wife.

"Don't come in."

"It's me," whispered my father.

The old man's voice immediately mellowed.

They spoke in Ladino. Then he spoke to me. "*Tu vois ça*?" he said, meaning, "Can you believe this? Do you see what's happening to me?"

A FEW weeks later, Monsieur Costa deposited me at my grandmother's house as usual. She shut the gate behind him and, together, we watched his motorcycle roar toward Camp de César. She then looked at the sky and with her usual enthusiasm said, "Just look at this blue! We'll have a beautiful day at the beach today."

As I walked into the house, I felt an unusually cool draft running through the corridor. Even the stuffy smell around the pantry seemed gone, and from the garden the scent of basil filled the house. Something had changed. "I'm going to put this on," my grandmother said, displaying a light-blue linen and cotton dress with buttons running all the way to her ankles.

When I made to open my grandfather's door, she whispered he was sleeping, that I should not disturb him. "We should pick fresh fruit for the beach," she said. But I had heard the faint crackle of my grandfather's old radio from behind his closed door, and I went to open it, certain that he was not sleeping now but sitting at his little table listening to his news broadcast. Perhaps he had already heard me come in the house and was about to open the door to meet me. I pressed

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down the handle to push his door open and felt him pull at the same time.

I said good morning, and just the sound of his name spoken out loud in his room assured me he had to be there. But the room was unusually bright, with its windows wide open, overlooking a street I had never before seen or even suspected existed. From one of its shops came the loud sound of a radio I had mistaken for his. The wind had pulled open the door as soon as I had touched the handle.

The round table with the radio had been pushed against the wall. His ashtray was sparkling clean for the first time ever, and the mattress on his bed was folded back on the frame, like a man performing a back exercise. A bedspread was thrown clumsily over the whole thing, no sheets, just the frayed, faded stripes of the ancient mattress. Over the bedstand was a large mound of suits, neatly piled, while in his closet all one heard was the chime of hangers dangling from the metal bar.

I saw a row of shoes without trees, stashed like limp and lifeless sloughs, under the dresser. He had always said they were older than I was.

At first, everyone said he was sleeping. Then they said he was resting. Then that he was gone. "Don't disturb him" evolved into "Don't disturb his things." His cane, his tobacco case, his deck of cards, his dentures floating in solution, his penknife, his loose things that not even the passage of time could tidy. Then they began to disappear. I noticed Abdou wearing his shoes. And Mohammed, Abdou's nephew. The servants did not appreciate shoelaces, so they would pull them out, walking with the instep wide open, the tongues sticking out insolently.

When, several years later, we moved all his garden furniture to our summerhouse at Mandara, something of those hot, peaceful summer mornings came to stay with us as well. Much of the garden furniture had been painted over, but what lingered there was not his presence, not even his memory, but that vague sense of well-being that would fill his sunlit garden when I came looking for him, hoping to hear his cane or his billiard cue, so that we might pluck guavas.

AT LAST the day of the centennial arrived. At lunch, both my Great-Uncle Vili and my Great-Uncle Isaac read eulogies for their brother-in-law, my grandfather, a man who had ridiculed them thoughout his life. Because of the number of guests, dining tables had been moved into my great-grandmother's bedroom, a huge corner room with two balconies and plenty of sunlight.

While one of her sons was speaking, my one-hundred-year-old great-grandmother, seated at the center of the table, took a small decanter of olive oil that stood in front of her and poured a few drops on her empty plate. She sprinkled some salt on the oil, tore a small piece of bread, dunked it into the oil, and, holding the bread in place with one hand, pricked it with the fork she held in the other and brought it to her mouth.

"I can't help it—I'm hungry," said the old woman as she caught an admonitory gaze from one of her septuagenarian daughters.

After the speeches were over, someone toasted the memory of my grandfather. Everyone said, "Amen." My grandmother, seated next to me, turned to her neighbor, Madame Victoria, and said, "I used to tell him, 'Your head is in the clouds'; and he would say, 'And you, Esther, your feet are underground.' Look who's underground now." The smile disappeared from my grandmother's lips as she cast another look at her mother. "Elsa," she said to her sister, "wipe off her chin before the oil drips on her dress."

My great-grandmother wore a black lace dress that day. Next to her was seated her elder brother, who had come from Turkey for the occasion of his younger sister's centennial. I remember shaking his big, fat, miller's hand and staring at that gruff immobile mass of flesh, only to hear the man produce his sweetest strain, "*Bonjour, jeune homme.*" For the pictures that were taken that day, my great-grandmother posed standing, very upright and very alert, her thin dark lips tightly pursed, which was how she smiled, a restrained, cunning, murky look in her eyes. In her hand she held my grandfather's cane.

She was asked to make a little speech to the 30 or so family members gathered for lunch. Since she did not know French or Italian well enough to speak for a minute without making at least ten mistakes, she gave a small blessing in Ladino which ended with the cheerful though rather flat *salud y berakhá*, health and blessing. But then, urged by her sons, she finally yielded and began to speak in a halting, heavily accented French, saying that she had lived in Egypt for exactly 50 years, that half her life had been spent in Egypt, and the other half not in Egypt, and that the part not lived in Egypt was lived abroad—and yet in all these years, she went on proudly, she had never learned more than 50 words of Arabic. "One for every year," snickered her elder son, Nessim.

She knew Arabic so poorly, she went on, that one day she had asked an Arab servant to help her make a bed. The man suddenly blanched and grew flustered and asked her please to reconsider. She had no idea to what he was referring and insisted they go and make the bed together—until a Greek chambermaid informed her that what she had told the servant in Arabic was, "Come with me together in the bed." The irony, which escaped no one in the room, was not that this extremely old matron could make such a dreadful mistake but that had she insisted, the poor servant would have had to comply. Everyone burst out laughing.

By late afternoon, guests had begun to arrive. When I awoke from my nap, the house was filled with noise. By evening, they were crowding the

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corridors, the entrance hall, and the two living rooms. Many of the men sported rows of medals, emblems, and rosettes on their chests, some with larger medals hanging from striped bands around their necks, everybody looking like a retired member of a small brigade meeting on the anniversary of a significant battle. Someone took me into the kitchen, where the maid Latifa got me dinner. Members of a musical quintet had just finished eating and were busy brushing the crumbs off their dark suits and wiping their mouths with handkerchiefs. They were not due to start for a while yet.

After I had eaten, my grandmother came and took me by the hand, and, walking about the house, introduced me to friends of the family, most of whom were very old and portly and spoke the same slow, stuffy, melodiously well-articulated French. To my surprise, I caught sight of Hisham, our servant, standing in the middle of the crowd, wearing a fez and the traditional waiter's garb of which he was so proud, holding with his one arm a giant silver platter that was decorated with flowers. He winked when he saw me, and I shouted "*Ya Hisham!*" but my grandmother quickly tried to hush me up.

Suddenly the lights went out. Everyone gave an astonished "Ah," and for a brief moment there was a hushed, expectant hubbub. Then came the sound of a gong. Holding a tall lighted taper in his hand, old Uncle Nessim stood on a chair and, with the look of an amused scarecrow on a moonlit heath, announced that 100 candles would be lit throughout the house and everyone was welcome to help light them. "But this is absolutely divine," mouthed the wife of an English lord whom everyone called Madame Lord. They all began queuing up as the servants passed out the tapers. Gradually, the corner of the room where we all stood grew lighter and lighter.

"Come," said my grandmother, "we'll be the first to light these here." And without thanking Hisham, who was also handing out the tapers, she grabbed one from his tray. "How beautiful," said someone looking out the window. "Just fabulous," said another. "I've lighted four, and I'm going to light another and another—oh, so much fun, so much," squealed Madame Lord, breathless with excitement.

"Here," said my grandmother, holding the taper in my hand as my mother hovered behind me, kissing me. "Light these two. This one and that one." She pointed at two candlesticks. "This one is for grandfather, because he will be happy you remembered him tonight." She lifted me up as my father and my mother guided my hand. "And now this one you light for—"

"I'll light it for *her*—" I indicated my great-grandmother; everyone was extraordinarily pleased—"for when she'll die."

There was a chilly silence. "Children," exclaimed Uncle Vili, who knew how to smooth all sorts of ripples.

"He's not a cruel boy. He just doesn't know how to keep his mouth shut," my grandmother apologized.

By now all the rooms were aglow with candlelight, and when the servants opened the windows and balcony doors to let in fresh air, a mild autumnal breeze lilted through the house, swaying the lights ever so gently, as everyone marveled at the effect of the light against crystal.

"This we'll never forget," said Mr. Khatchadourian.

"Thank you, thank you," replied Aunt Elsa, before turning immediately to complain to Madame Victoria of the awkward way Armenians spoke French: "Even when in Europe we'll be, of this we'll think each year on this one same day. This I promise."

A bang was heard in an adjacent room. "*Evviva lo sciampagna,*" cried an Italian gentleman. Uncle Nessim announced that, as the eldest of the siblings, he had uncorked the first bottle. "I'll keep this forever," he said turning to his mother, staring at the cork as if trying to decipher the precious inscription on its head. "We usually say 'May you live to be a hundred,' but now I don't know what to say."

"Don't get all worked up now, Nessico," she replied, tapping him on the arm. "You've done enough already."

"But there won't be another," he protested.

"No, there won't."

"If only we could start again."

"*Evviva signora,*" cheered the Italian gentleman who had overheard the mawkish conversation and who suddenly began singing "*Viva il vino spumeggiante*" in a loud, stentorian voice, motioning to the band and all those around him to join in a chorus. And everyone, even those only vaguely familiar with the aria from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, joined in the song.

No one had heard Monsieur Costa arrive. But suddenly I saw him standing in the middle of the hallway, looking like a baffled hermit who had strayed into a pagan orgy, scanning the room for a familiar face, dressed as always in his bombardier jacket, his shirt collar wide open, his hair greased back, the trimmed black mustache about to touch his upper lip.

"Please excuse the disturbance," he said as soon as he saw my grandmother, "but I must see His Excellency your brother immediately."

Uncle Vili came walking quickly, muttering "Ay, ay, ay," to himself, knowing that such a visit could only mean trouble. "Come into the kitchen—no, in here," he told Monsieur Costa, pointing to a junk-filled room next to the kitchen that sometimes doubled as the maid Latifa's. "You, out," said Vili, pointing at me. "I want to come in," I insisted, promising not to utter a word. I was on the verge of crying. "Come in, but not a sound or I'll kill you."

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"They caught my brother," said Monsieur Costa in one breath.

"That was a risk. Everyone knew that," replied Vili.

"Well, yes. They have the money of course. But they also know the number of the bank accounts in Switzerland. And they have a list of names."

"You mean the fool carried a list of names on him?"

"Apparently."

"Then it's all over."

Monsieur Costa did not say a word but kept his arms crossed with a look of helpless consternation, as though trying to avert a blow.

"I am in as much trouble as you, Your Excellency," he said in the end. "There is a ship leaving tonight. It's a Greek merchant vessel, I can guarantee passage on it. I will be on it as well. Now, if Your Excellency will permit me, there are a few other people I must warn as well." Monsieur Costa took the service entrance and was never seen again, not even by his wife.

"Call Nessim and Isaac now—and don't look so worried, for God's sake."

This was my first secret mission, and I waited for the right moment to tell each of my great-uncles that they were urgently needed in the *chambre des karakibs*—which in Arabic meant bric-a-brac. Once I escorted the two of them, I was told to stay outside.

I tried to listen at the door, but all I heard were exclamations of distress. Then they opened the door and asked me to bring in my grandmother only. She must have sensed something was amiss, and by the look on Monsieur Costa's face when he arrived she must have known it concerned the police. One of my uncles was advising Vili against taking the ship. Costa could no longer be trusted. Instead, a car would drive him directly to the Cairo airport that same night, from where he could catch a dawn flight to Rome without anyone asking too many questions.

None of this caught Uncle Vili by surprise. For years he had been liquidating his assets in Egypt and secretly smuggling money to Switzerland in defiance of the Egyptian government's ban on all shipment of currency abroad. The punishment for the crime was imprisonment and eventual expulsion. Those holdings still in his name in Egypt were kept for appearances' sake and could easily be sacrificed. He had even managed to ship his clothes as well as his antique furniture to Europe. All he was leaving behind of value was a poorly kept villa filled with junk, rugs, and a set of the *Treccani* encyclopedia, which in another life had been given to him by, and bore the signature of, none other than Il Duce himself. Not too many years later that coveted set would fall into my hands, only to be sold to a dealer for less than a dollar when we finally left Egypt in 1965.

PRESENTLY, I saw my grandmother come out of the junk room tucking her handkerchief into her left sleeve, shutting the door immediately behind her.

"What is it?" asked my father.

"We've decided to start the waltz now," she replied.

At that moment, the quintet sounded a few notes and everyone cleared the space in the middle of the room to watch Vili, the youngest son, dance a Verdi waltz with his mother on the occasion of her birthday. Together they took a few rehearsed turns around the room, pretended to stop a moment, and then resumed the dance, everyone applauding as the couple spun in the light of the 100 candles, until Vili brought her back to where she had been sitting and where my mother waited to help the old lady regain her seat. Without asking, Vili reached out for my mother as he let go of his own, took her into his arms, and suddenly accelerated the pace of the waltz, taking dizzying swirls around the room, this ex-infantryman and veteran of two world wars wheeling the *tarsha* from Ibrahimieh, showing the world that a sixty-year-old rake could still ignite the heart of a thirty-year-old belle.

When the waltz was over, everyone applauded. Vili returned my mother to my father and said, "I owe your wife many apologies. I should have married her myself." He took my mother's hand in his and brought it close to his lips and, still holding it there, whispered, "I won't see you for many, many years. Goodbye." My mother blushed, smiled, and said, "Thank you."

Vili rushed to the kitchen, where his brother's chauffeur had been waiting for him with his brother's raincoat, his brother's suit, and a battered suitcase wrenched out of the junk room which his sisters had now filled with old clothes so he would not arrive at the airport looking suspicious. The service door was opened, and from the landing outside, an unmistakable smell of *zibala*, refuse, wafted into the kitchen.

There, so as not to arouse suspicion among the guests who had no notion of what was taking place at the other end of the apartment, his sisters had come one by one to bid their most cherished brother farewell. Each wept, then washed her face, put on a smile, and went back to mingle with the guests while another took her place, exhorting her youngest brother, as each had probably done before both world wars, to behave, be good, and be careful.

My grandmother, his senior by almost fifteen years, was the last to say goodbye. "You won't start now," she said, "because if you do I will." "I won't, I won't," he promised. They hugged and kissed, after which Vili asked, "Esther, bless me." Unable to hold back her tears now, she began weeping aloud, placing a shaking palm upon his head, sobbing the Hebrew words out loud until she had said "Amen."

"Come, enough of this," she said as she kept caressing the lapel of his jacket. "Promise to write. Don't just disappear." Unable to speak, he nodded.

The chauffeur picked up the suitcase and pro-

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ceeded down the winding service stairway. Vili followed him, but he had not taken two steps before he suddenly collapsed against the banister. My grandmother exclaimed, "*Santa Madonna!*" A second later, seated on one of grimy metal treads of the stairway, Vili exploded in a loud sob.

"I'll never see Mother again," he began weeping, swaying like a drunkard, his face resting in both hands. "How can I go without saying goodbye, how can I do that to her, how?" I noticed that his lip was bleeding. "Blood!" I shouted. "It's nothing," he said, brushing the blood away with his palm as he resumed crying. The chauffeur had come back upstairs to help him. "No, leave me here a second." My grandmother asked me to fetch a glass of whiskey. "Ask Elsa, she'll understand." I asked Hisham instead, who immediately poured a glass for me. I walked back along the corridor with the huge glass. No one asked me anything.

"What a dog's life," Vili said after drinking the contents. "All these years, and now this."

"*Adiós*," he said.

His elder sister and I waved at him until the shape of his gray hat and of his hand disappeared all the way downstairs through the half-lit concentric turns of the winding banister.

"And now we must tell no one," warned my grandmother.

We shut the door of the kitchen behind us, walked through the pantry, shut the pantry door, and suddenly we were back among the guests. "Where were you?" asked my father. "Don't ask," gestured my grandmother. Then, seeing he was beginning to look perplexed, she said, "Vili left." "So soon?" he asked. "He left for good. *Understand?*"

The only one who did not know the truth for the next two days was my great-grandmother. She had been told a lie so the festivities would not be disrupted.

"He's in Cairo," they said in the end. "The king wanted to see him." No one had ever told the old lady that the king had been deposed many years earlier.

Still, she knew something was amiss.

"He isn't dead, is he?"

"Dead? Who, Vili? He's as indestructible as Bismarck. Not like the other one."

The "other one" was my grandfather.

"He was a poor soul," said my other grandfather to his daughter, my mother, as we made our way through a narrow passage in between the graves on Yom Kippur a few weeks later. We had just been to lay flowers on his mother's grave and were now headed toward my grandfather's.

I knew the way from previous visits to the cemetery with my father and sauntered ahead, avoiding the low slabs. When we arrived, I saw my father waiting for us.

"The poor man," said my mother's father after reflecting a moment. "We never got along, though God knows I never nursed any ill will toward him. But—" he added, meaning, all that was water under the bridge.

"Can I recite a few words?" he asked his son-in-law, careful not to seem pushy when it came to religious matters.

"Yes," said my father, with a look of forbearing irony that almost said, "if you really must."

My other grandfather spoke the words softly, slowly, almost meekly, with diffidence and an air of mild apology one never expects from the faithful. When he was done, he gave his daughter a look and she immediately spoke two or three words of Hebrew, after which she said "Amen."

"*Voilà, Monsieur Albert*," said my grandfather, addressing the stone. Then, with the timidity of a man who had never felt at ease with his son-in-law, he touched my father on the shoulder once, a gesture of hindered sympathy that he did not wish to prolong for fear of overstepping his bounds.

"I feel for you," he said. "None of us is going to stay much longer in Egypt, and, frankly, it hurts when I think we'll have to leave our loved ones behind, me my mother, and you your father. They would have been happier to lie where they were born, with their loved ones. Your father once asked me, 'What did I come to Egypt for if everyone will be leaving soon, leaving me stranded all by myself, twiddling my thumbs in my grave, the last Jew on this parched, half-baked strip of dust teeming with dirty feet?' He hated Egypt and he's buried in Egypt. 'What could be worse than being buried in a cemetery where you know nobody, Monsieur Jacques?' he would ask.

"And I tell you what: worse than dying is the thought that no one will ever come to your grave, that no one will come wash the letters of your name. Everyone remembers for a few months, a few years, on anniversaries, and then, a generation later, they forget you. And the earth might as well make dust of you, for you're as good as unborn—you never *were* born—even if you live to be a hundred."

My father did not reply, though the allusion to the centennial did not escape him.

On our way out of the cemetery, the four of us greeted other Jewish families who had come to pray for their dead. My grandfather was going to synagogue and had asked whether we would join him for the service.

"Not today," said my father, clearly thinking of coffee.

"I'll come," said my mother.

It was a typical Alexandrian autumn weekday morning. One could even have gone to the beach. My father said we would take a walk in the city. He looked up at the clear sky, thought a moment, and trying to sound casual on our way to La Côte, said, "I hope they'll give us the same table."

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In the Classroom

Mark Gerson

DEAR COMMENTARY:

I am having a wonderful time teaching at St. Luke's, a Catholic high school in Jersey City.* I teach American history to the sophomores—five classes in all. Though my students are learning about everything from Columbus to the Civil War, I'm sure I'm learning far more than they.

One thing that has struck me from the outset is the sheltered sophistication of many of my students, who are about fifteen years old and mainly members of one or another racial or ethnic minority group. I say sheltered because many of them have never been to New York City, which is only five minutes away on the PATH train. Some have never set foot at the Statue of Liberty, a five-minute ferry ride from Liberty State Park in the middle of Jersey City. Before I made it a requirement, many had never read a newspaper, and their ignorance of the most basic current events is shocking. In my second-most-advanced class no one could identify a New Jersey U.S. Senator; the best guess was Gorbachev. Another student identified Frank Lautenberg as the deposed leader of Haiti, and yet another asked if Aristotle and Aristide were the same person.

But they can sing entire rap songs by heart, know the O.J. Simpson case in detail, and are far, far more sophisticated in the ways of the world than I or any of my friends were in high school and college. They approach the world with a strong dose of skepticism: they are less likely than we were to be corrupted by frauds, well-meaning or otherwise. They may make bad decisions, but will be more likely to know exactly why they are making them.

Their sophistication comes through in the current-events presentation I have made a part of the curriculum. When I required them to read a paper every day, I strongly recommended the *New York Times*, but no one has yet taken me up on that. Several read (and bring in articles from) their ethnic papers: the Puerto Rican paper, the Filipino paper, the Brazilian paper. I did not expect that, but have encouraged it in the hope of stimulating discussion at home. (I do not know whether that has happened.)

I break down current events into five categories: international news, national news, local news, sports, and "wild card." The category which has sparked the greatest interest is local news; most students bring in articles about crime, and a few have reported on crimes they actually witnessed in their homes or on the street. Whenever a student brings up a crime story, others invariably relate personal experiences. Many have spoken of visiting criminals in jails. Most of these criminals are relatives who have been convicted of drug offenses.

There is a fundamental assumption among my students that the criminal-justice system works. I have not heard a single comment about the system being "racist" or in the thrall of some conspiracy. Not that they think it perfect; one student mentioned an uncle who was arrested for drug use but escaped being charged by giving the arresting officer $400. But this story was presented as an aberration, a case of individual malfeasance and not a symbol of a systemic problem.

The anger many of my students direct toward the criminal-justice system does not concern its legitimacy, but its ineffectiveness. Common questions are: Why can't there be a death penalty for rape? If rapists can't be executed, can't they at least be castrated? Why don't murderers get the death penalty automatically? Why are drug dealers allowed to live? William J. Bennett's mock-proposal (when he was Drug Czar) to behead drug dealers in public parks was very popular in the one class where it was discussed. In another class, I explained the Singapore system of justice; the students greatly admired it, and many wanted to try caning in Jersey City. A Filipino student spoke of how his beloved Marcos government used to carry prisoners naked in carts through the public square. The other students found that an excellent idea and could not understand why I was against trying it here.

One person the students do not think is guilty, however, is O.J. Simpson. Few are even willing to

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* St. Luke's is not its real name.

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admit the possibility. This faith is strongest among black girls. To them, the Simpson case is a racial issue, plain and simple. When I say I think O.J. is guilty, they dismiss me with a smile; of course, I wouldn't understand. Remembering Sidney Hook's question to a diehard supporter of Alger Hiss—"If Hiss were to come out tomorrow and announce, 'I'm guilty!' would you believe him?"—I asked my students the same question about O.J. Like Sidney Hook's interlocutor, they replied: absolutely not. He would just be covering up for somebody else.

I should add that though my black students identify with Simpson on racial grounds and for racial reasons, they are not offended at me for believing him guilty. I am, they are convinced, merely naive.

The racial situation at St. Luke's is in general very interesting. The school is home to seemingly every conceivable race and ethnic combination, and everyone gets along. Cliques are color blind, though dating appears not to be. Everyone seems to be one-quarter this or one-half that; it is hopeless trying to follow who is what.* This does not mean that the students don't try; most say they are *something*. But there was greater ethnic solidarity among my Jewish friends at Williams College, or among the Italian-Americans with whom I once worked on a political campaign in Essex County, New Jersey, than among the students of any race or ethnicity at St. Luke's.

WHEN I applied for teaching jobs in the spring and early summer of last year, I had a very difficult time even getting an interview. My chances were dead as soon as it was discovered that I was white. I was told this directly: "minority" students need "minority" role models. This made little sense to me at the time; actually, it was infuriating. Now that I have been at St. Luke's for six weeks, it makes less sense than ever, and I wonder how anyone who has spent a month in the inner city could harbor such an absurd belief. The students barely notice a teacher's race, and when they do, they think nothing of it. All teachers are judged by the same standards: it does not matter if one is black, Hispanic, Jewish, or Martian.

Some of my students, however, seem to understand that whites can be easily manipulated by the race issue. After I had punished several black students with detention one day, one of them claimed—jokingly—that I must be a racist. I dismissed the comment with an amused glance; whereupon the others, impressed, started to tease the boy who had made the charge: his scam had failed. At the end of class I asked him why he had brought it up, and he admitted that he was just trying to waste time.

In another class a student suggested that we were not doing enough black history, and complained that she only learned about her people in February, "black-history month." This comment was silly: we had just spent a week on 18th-century slavery. I said so, and added that we would not be devoting February to black history, either. Blacks, like other groups, were an integral part of American history and would be covered as such. This went over well with the students; they understand their manipulations better than anyone else, and respect those who refuse to indulge them.

On the other hand, the seeming success of racial integration at St. Luke's is belied by the total prevalence of race in all political or quasi-political discussions relating to American history—and not just in the obvious cases (like Thomas Jefferson's "hypocrisy" as a slaveholder). After telling one class, for example, that *The Federalist Papers* were written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, I asked if there were any questions. "Yes, Mr. Gerson. Was John Jay a black man?" This constant playing of the race card provides students with a way out of confronting history seriously, liberating them from the need to think through complex issues.

I am the only Jew at St. Luke's—an item of curiosity to my students. Most have never met a Jew before, and are eager to learn. Much of what they know comes from the movie *Schindler's List*, which has made them genuinely sensitive to the tragedy of Jewish history. They are also very curious about the Jewish religion, bombarding me with questions ranging from "what is a bar mitzvah?" to "do Jews believe in premarital sex?"

True, there has been an occasional anti-Semitic comment. One student asked why Jews were racist (me excepted, of course). Another asked why the Jews killed Christ. I thanked each of them for being honest and tried briefly to dispel the premises of their questions. I do not blame them for asking: these fifteen-year-olds have certainly heard such things from someone in authority, somewhere. But it seems to me unproductive to dwell on the matter. Since I do not believe prejudice can be eliminated through discussion, I hope to contravene spoken and unspoken anti-Semitic attitudes through the example I set during the course of the year.

One reason I doubt there is much more anti-Semitism than what I have heard is that my students are honest to a fault. In a manner we bourgeois folk would call tactless, they say whatever comes into their minds. In the middle of a lesson on Columbus, one raised her hand.

"Yes, Yolanda."

"Are you Jewish, Mr. Gerson?"

"Yes, Yolanda. Why do you ask now, when we're studying Columbus?"

"Because you look Jewish."

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* I have yet to meet a student who describes himself as Hispanic. There are Peruvians, Brazilians, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, etc., but these subgroups do not identify ethnically with one another.

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MY STUDENTS have a good conception of success and a rough idea about how to become successful. I learned this at the beginning of the year when I had them write down where they envisioned themselves in five and fifteen years. The vast majority planned on going to college, many en route to professional careers. Perhaps as many as a quarter of them wanted to become pediatricians. I don't know why, but I would guess that their pediatrician is the most respected figure in their lives. Many others were headed for the law; one girl even specified that she intended to become a "corprite [*sic*] lawyer." Still others entertained plans based more directly on their experience and interests: one girl, who comes in every week with new and interesting hair arrangements, said she wanted to own a beauty salon. She sure knows hair, and I have no doubt that she will be successful.

The one discouraging note is that many want to be professional basketball players. I, too, once wanted to be a professional basketball player—but then I entered the sixth grade. I would have thought that these kids—especially the ones without a prayer of making the varsity team—would have outgrown such a notion; but no. At least they realize that they must go to college before the Knicks will draft them; there, if not before, I trust they will hit upon more realistic career goals.

In any event, however unrealistic some of their goals may be, my students do display genuine interest in intellectual pursuits, *if* they find them enjoyable. A few weeks ago, I announced to two of my classes that I would be starting a mock-trial team to compete in a statewide contest. I explained the procedure: the state bar association had provided a cocaine-smuggling case, and we would have to prepare both the prosecution and the defense, which meant that four lawyers, six witnesses, a half-dozen jurors, and a number of alternates would be needed.

This would be fun, I said, but a lot of work, possibly more than the students could imagine. We would settle for nothing less than the county championship. They would need to understand the case and their part in it well enough to be able to handle whatever the opposing side conjured up. They would have to understand the notion of objections well enough to make appropriate ones on the spur of the moment and respond to any leveled at them.

Remembering that my own high-school team years earlier had fielded a group of top students who were advised by some of the best lawyers in New Jersey, I was mindful of the tremendous disadvantages St. Luke's would labor under. I did not say this to the class, but I stressed that many other teams were more experienced than we, and that we would have a lot of catching-up to do. I then asked who was interested.

Every student in the class raised his hand. For a moment I was taken aback: hadn't I stressed how much work this would be? No matter. I asked my students to think it over and get back to me if they changed their minds. Later that afternoon, two students appeared: they had discussed the issue with their basketball coach and had arranged to miss practice for mock-trial sessions when necessary.

ONE problem afflicting the team is the slang my students use in any circumstance. "We be goin'," "I ain't goin' to do nothin' " are common phrases—as are the expressions "Word is bon" and "Word up," both meaning "That's the truth!" and used to punctuate a powerful point.

"I ain't doin' no work for that teacher."

"Word is bon!"

Some of my students, meaning no offense, also curse regularly in class. After making a good point in a discussion last week, a boy turned to the girl he was talking with and declared, "My s--t is sweet!" I had to explain why this was inappropriate.

So new rules have been imposed in my class: verbs must be used and conjugated properly, double negatives are forbidden, slang is banned, and cursing is a cardinal sin. Abiding by these rules requires significant effort, considering that the students often do not know when they are violating them.

Language being a crucial component of identity, I was afraid my students would disagree vigorously with my insistence on standard English. I would have to convince them that changing their way of communicating was in their own best interest.

I started my crusade by telling them that if a mock-trial lawyer or witness slipped into non-standard English even once during the actual meet, the whole team would be laughed out of the courtroom. They did not dispute this, but claimed that they could turn their normal lingo on and off. No, you can't, I countered: look how you talk in class.

Then they defended their normal usage in relativist clichés. "You speak one way, and we speak another. So why is your way better?" I retorted that several times in our discussion they themselves had referred to "proper" and "improper" English. Eventually they were convinced, and grudgingly agreed to make a concerted effort.

Now when they come into class, my students take pains to catch themselves when they slip into nonstandard usage. At times, they sound plodding: retarded, one girl suggested. There is no shame in this, I said. Actually, what sounds plodding is, in this instance, the melody of real progress. I reminded them that Thomas Jefferson counted to ten before he spoke to ensure that he would not embarrass himself; surely it was per-

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missible for students at St. Luke's to count to five or six.

A CONSTANT source of fascination has been my students' conception of justice as fairness. If several are talking in class and I give one detention, the one singled out invariably becomes incensed. Not in his own behalf—he understands the punishment is deserved—but because *all* those talking should be punished accordingly. Nor do those who have escaped punishment become upset with the one making this demand.

Early in the year I explained that punishment in my class would be determined by the principle of selective incarceration. While I would like to punish all violations, I could not possibly catch everyone. But bad acts would be punished because they were bad, even if equally bad acts unfortunately passed without notice. If they did not like the punishment, they should not commit the offense. I can't say my students are happy with this system, but I think they understand its logic.

When I went to high school, we always tried to ingratiate ourselves with our teachers; it was our job to get on their "good side." Students at St. Luke's labor under no such notion. It's the teachers who have a lot to prove—we have to earn the respect of our students. These students think in radically democratic terms; all authority and all privilege must be earned.

The respect of the students is essential if they are going to pay any attention to what the teacher says or assigns. But how to earn it? Pure discipline can work (I give several detentions a day), but it must be supported by the fundamental belief that the authority behind it is morally and not just procedurally legitimate. There are several ways to instill this belief.

First, students appreciate a sense of humor. The ability to laugh at oneself, and to turn a student's antics around in a humorous manner, is invaluable. Two athletes in one of my classes repeatedly "slapped five" whenever one of them answered a question correctly. I asked them to stop. They did it again. I wondered out loud if they were capable of sitting through an entire period without touching each other. The whole class (including the athletes) laughed, and there has been no slapping-five since.

Second, students want to know that their teachers feel confident. One teacher, who tripped over his briefcase twice on the first day, has remained a figure of ridicule.

Third, students want to know that their teachers are smart. They regard intelligence and knowledge as prerequisites for authority, and need to sense it right away. The first time they ask, respectfully, "How do you know all that?" the teacher has crossed an important barrier.

Fourth, students want their teachers to be able to identify with them personally. I did this early on by playing basketball after school in the gym. One initially recalcitrant student changed his attitude completely when I blew by him with a crossover dribble several times in a row. The news traveled fast, and it helped me establish authority among quite a few students. Although I had worried (and was warned) that playing ball might be too familiar a gesture, the risk paid off handsomely. The students have not attempted to exploit my familiarity; they understand the difference between the court and the classroom.

Identifying with them on this level has also allowed me to counter an aspect of their culture I find very destructive: rap music. Though most of my students listen to little but rap, I consistently point out that it is terrible as music and carries a message that is anathema to most of their own beliefs. I have urged them to listen to Frank Sinatra instead, and I give them extra credit for coming to class with the title of a Sinatra song or a fact about his life or career. My top class has responded better than I ever expected: one student spent an entire Saturday morning listening to a New York radio station that plays popular standards and came in with the names of several dozen songs.

Adapting an idea from an article by Martin Marty in the *Christian Century*, I have also started a "Frank Sinatra Detention Club." Detention consists of writing, "Mr. Gerson, Ol' Blue Eyes is the best," or "When I go home, I am going to listen to the Chairman of the Board" 40 times while listening to Sinatra's recordings, anything from the Capitol years to the Dorsey sessions to the glorious new *Duets II*. Some dread these detentions because they dislike Sinatra. Others begin in terror but discover that he is not so bad after all. One who received a "Frank" two weeks ago has been humming "Saturday Night Is the Loneliest Night of the Week" ever since.

I realize I may possibly be constructing a perverse incentive, using Sinatra as punishment. Surely that is not the message I want to communicate; I want my students to appreciate Sinatra. But I rationalize my act by hoping that they will begin to want detention. When that happens, I will declare my operation a success and switch to Doo-Wop.

THE top class is the only one where students have heard of the Democratic and Republican parties. For homework one night, I asked them to write down the differences (if any) between the two parties. Their answers were crudely Marxist, almost caricatures. Republicans are "greedy, conceeded [*sic*] people," "only concerned for the rich and the upper class," and "want all the money for themselves and the government through high taxes." Democrats, on the other hand, "care for people like us, the minorities," "want to help the poor and the lower class," and "want to help everybody." Not one student

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had anything nice or even neutral to say about the Republican party.

The next day, I went through a list of issues. My students had already made it clear that they wanted to institute draconian punishment for nearly all criminals, but we went over the ground again. Then I moved to school choice. After explaining it, I asked for their opinion. Everyone was in favor of it. OK, I said, let's go on. Do you think prayer in school, or at graduation ceremonies, would make nonbelievers feel uncomfortable? The students found this preposterous. We're all in Catholic school, they said, few of us are Catholic, and no one feels uncomfortable during prayers and mass. How could anyone?

Of course I told them they were more Republican than many Republicans. Knowing that I am a Republican (I responded honestly when asked), they thought I was just trying to convert them, and refused to believe me.

But if these kids will never be Republicans, they are certainly no liberals, and never will be. That, anyway, is quite refreshing, even if what it means for the prospect of conservative politics in the inner cities is less clear.

It would be a gross understatement to say that for my students culture has primacy over politics. In their own way, they are passionately concerned about political ideas, especially regarding race; but they do not see politics as relevant to their lives. They go to school during the day, and many work long hours after school to pay their tuition and come home to major family responsibilities. If they saw any connection between politics and their future—about which most of them are quite concerned—they would certainly care a lot about politics. But they do not count on politics for their salvation. They count on themselves, their families, and their faiths—traditional vehicles of upward mobility for Americans.

THE one political issue that does capture the imagination of my students is school choice. It is a major issue in Jersey City, given that Mayor Bret Schundler's pilot program needs to pass the New Jersey Senate. Everyone here supports it, from the students to the principal, though some teachers and administrators are worried that it could become an invitation for the state to regulate Catholic schools.

On October 16, I took eight students to a rally for school choice in Liberty State Park, and it was a truly memorable experience.

Evincing a real interest in what was going on around them, the students learned a lot and benefited greatly from the day. They went to every table that had pamphlets and engaged the pamphleteers in conversation about whatever idea they were hawking. They did the same with spectators, protesters, and even the police. And they sat in rapt attention during a rousing and powerful speech by Mayor Schundler. (They met him before the rally started, and one asked if he'd like some of her French fries. "No thanks," Schundler replied, "I'm too nervous to eat.")

Unfortunately, the most exciting part of the day for the students was a fight that broke out not five feet behind us, when about 100 off-duty Jersey City policemen formed several lines behind a barricade 100 feet from the stage and shouted, "Bret Must Go!" They were not protesting school choice; they were upset about a union contract. But then, when one of the people attending the rally—a father with a small daughter—attempted to leave, a demonstrator prevented him from passing. There was pushing, and an off-duty cop decked the spectator. The state police quickly arrested the cop. One of my students took pictures of the whole melee. I developed them, hoping that one would be good enough for a newspaper, but none was.

This incident was quite disillusioning. Here were the police, the protectors of law and order, blatantly promulgating lawlessness. (It turned out their permit specified they were to stay *500* feet away.) Intricate arguments about the First Amendment can be made, but there is little doubt that the police violated the spirit of free speech by drowning out the speaker, and then behaved disgracefully toward someone engaged in lawful and peaceful assembly.

My fifteen-year-olds, who have a tenuous and ambiguous relationship with authority at best, and are taught on the street that the police are their enemy, were confused. Only slightly less confused myself, I could be of little help. And what was there to say? The event was self-explanatory. I admitted to my students that the police were wrong, very wrong—but this is something I never planned on having to say to these children, who desperately need to respect and trust the police.

We had taken a bus to the rally from another Catholic school, but they had left before us. It was a glorious day, and we decided to walk the three miles back. Through winding shortcuts around serene brooks and through abandoned junkyards, a rather interesting thing happened. My students stopped and talked with people along the way. Walking home, they recognized relatives, friends, neighbors, and just stopped and talked. This happens all the time in small towns where I have lived, but I had no idea that such a tight-knit community could develop in a large city. Much of the conversation was in Spanish.

ONE morning last week I saw one of my best students, Jon, standing outside school in a designer sweatshirt, sweatpants, six gold chains, high-top sneakers, and with a Walkman. This was strange. The school uniform is very strict and very simple: a light-blue St. Luke's knit shirt, black polyester pants, and black shoes. Chains have to be tucked into the shirt,

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shirts have to be tucked into the pants, and earrings cannot be larger than a quarter in diameter. Violations are punished by detention. Jon—like everyone—always wears his uniform in school. Why not *to* school? When I asked, he just shrugged, and said that he liked to wear comfortable clothes to school and did not mind changing.

I thought there might be more to it than that, and asked my students. Several quickly volunteered the answer. If they are seen in their neighborhoods or on the bus wearing a Catholic-school uniform, they will be beaten up. Now I notice many students changing immediately before and after school.

All this must be very difficult for them. In school, and presumably at home (because someone is paying $2,200 to send them to St. Luke's, and there is little scholarship money available), they are provided with structure and rules. In the street, they must conform to a different pattern if they are to have any friends. Since many of the students work after school and live far apart from one another, they cannot simply socialize among themselves; they need the friendship of public-school kids. Living a contradiction like this must cause a great deal of inner confusion.

But the pressures of the outside world have not stopped the students from progressing rapidly and effectively in the history curriculum. In two months, we have gone from Columbus to the Revolutionary War. Initially, some (especially in the slower classes) were skeptical about the purpose of it all. "Why do we have to do Columbus? We do him every year, and he is so boring."

"OK," I replied. "Tell me what you know about Columbus. If you know enough, we'll skip him and go on."

"I think he discovered America."

"Is that all you know?"

"Yes."

Their honesty was helpful to me. I have found that it is not Columbus that bores them, but the very idea of history presented in a certain way. My department chair warned me over the summer that the students do not see the "relevance" of history. And so from the beginning I have tried to demonstrate that history is not the sum of dates, names, and places but rather a collection of fascinating stories. I have explained that historical figures display the same loves, hates, fears, foibles, passions, worries, and ambitions as they do. The personal lives of historical figures are every bit as spirited as ours, and the personal lives of long-dead men intersect with their public personas just as ours do. This point has resonated well with my students. Perhaps too well: one asked me today if George Washington wore a wig because he was gay.

When historical events are presented as story, students learn them well. On their last test, many students who could not identify the date of the settlement of Jamestown were able to tell the story of John Smith and Pocahontas in exquisite detail.

They also do well when complex historical ideas can be tied to their own lives. Teaching the Calvinism of the Puritans, I explained the notion of worldly asceticism, which I consider one of the most beautiful ideas in Western thought, and one that my students should try to live by. I told them this, and they understood the reasons very quickly. They did an excellent job on the homework assignment I gave them: "Write a story about a day in the life of a worldly ascetic."

THE teachers and administrators at St. Luke's are wonderful. The dedication of the faculty is especially inspiring. The pay is very low, starting at $15,480 and not rising much higher. But that is never an issue. The feeling of camaraderie generated by commitment to a common purpose is electric. This is the only organization I have ever been a part of that is immune to political infighting. All of the teachers and administrators are willing to help one another and to lend advice when needed. Around 40 percent of the faculty are under twenty-five and another 40 percent are over forty-five, but our relationships all around are terrific. We respect and learn from the experience of the older teachers, and they help us channel our energy and our ability to identify with the students. The only distinction between nuns and lay teachers is that the nuns are addressed as "Sister," while lay teachers are on a first-name basis.

It is a marvelous atmosphere, and I am lucky to be a part of it.

Sincerely,
MARK GERSON
November 18, 1994

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A Feminist Seder

Wendy Shalit

OF ALL the storybook characters who people my earliest memories, I remain fondest of that rotten bunch of children from the Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle books—the ones with ridiculous but endearing "character ailments." And among all of these problem children—the Never-Want-To-Go-To-Bedder, the child with Won't-Pick-Up-Toys-itis—my favorite is the impudent Answer-Backer, Miss Mary O'Toole, who, whenever her parents ask her to perform even the most minor task, blinks her eyes rapidly, swishes her hair impertinently, and loudly declares, "I'll do it because I want to, but not because you tell me to!"

I encountered the impudent Miss O'Toole again—quite a few of her likeness, in fact—when I attended a feminist Passover seder this past April at my liberal-arts college. For example, when it came time to light the candles to mark the onset of the Passover festival, the various Misses O'Toole assembled in my college's Jewish Center wrinkled up their faces and, reading from their prepared script, announced: "Lighting candles is traditionally a woman's duty in Judaism. Tonight we light these festival candles not because we must by Jewish law—but in order to shed light on this seder table!"

But then, to borrow a well-known phrase from the Haggadah—the ancient text that is read at most seder tables—this was a night truly different from all other nights. To begin with, most of the assembled Mary O'Tooles had filed into the Jewish Center wearing *yarmulkes*, the ritual headgear traditionally worn by Jewish men. And the seder took place long after Passover—presumably because the actual holiday had fallen, inconveniently, during spring break. The recitation of the Ten Plagues had been altered as well, to become "The Ten Plagues That [Men] Have Brought Against Women." These contemporary hardships, enumerated in the *Feminist Haggadah* set before me, included: "The Lack of Acceptance of Lesbianism," "The Lack of Research Attention to Women's Medical Needs," "The Media Image of Women," "Gender Wage Gaps and Feminization of Poverty," "Threats to Abortion Rights," "Lack of Female Role Models," and "Our Exclusion from History."

Still another turn of events was the gloss given to the traditional Four Questions usually put by children to the assembled company. Why *was* this night different from all other nights? "Because," someone piped up, "tonight the women are not in the KITCHEN!" Our text, more historical-minded, offered this: "Because on this night we especially recall the hardships of the FEMALE slaves!" And everyone then chorused:

> At all other seders we eat bitter herbs to recall the suffering of the slaves in Egypt, but at this seder we eat bitter herbs to taste the bitterness and frustration we feel at our exclusion from history!

Around the time these uplifting sentiments were being expressed, I had the effrontery to remark that I had a few questions about the questions. I was told in no uncertain terms "not to disrupt the liturgy." "Liturgy?," I queried just once, and then fell silent. For all the wondrous new freedoms filling the room that night, freedom from feminist orthodoxy was not to be one of them.

And so the seder pressed on, complete with a version of *Dayenu*, the song giving thanks to God for deliverance, which on this occasion expressed our gratitude for the gift of Gloria Steinem and Andrea Dworkin and the many others who (the company intoned) had bravely brought us "out from under patriarchal bondage." Even the matzah, that humble symbol of purity, was not spared from feminist revisionism; because of its plainness and flatness, it was rediscovered as the perfect metaphor for "a woman, flat in the relief of history."

ARE women "flat in the relief" of Jewish history? One would have thought that women loom very large indeed, most saliently as the prime conveyors of Jewish values from generation to generation. But, of course, in order to appreciate the role Jewish women have played historically—a role whose value, we are told in the book of Proverbs, is "beyond rubies"—one must respect the family and the role women play in it, which most feminists have not been eager to do. The accomplished wife and mother may be of value "beyond rubies" to God, her husband, and her family, but to most feminists, including the ones at my seder, she is worthless. Opening the oven of history, they proclaim themselves distressed to find only matzah there, when all along they have belittled women who know how to bake bread.

But perhaps I am being too apocalyptic. After all, even at colleges like mine, the monopoly on discourse of all kinds that has been long enjoyed by feminists appears to be coming—slowly—to an end, and with it, their exemption from scrutiny. Unfortunately, however, even after feminism has been discredited, the damage it has wrought will most certainly live on. In the case of Judaism, it seemed to me after attending the Passover seder, that damage might be greater than the otherwise laughable revisions of the Haggadah suggested. But was I wrong?

WENDY SHALIT, *a new contributor, is a sophomore at Williams College where she is senior editor of a campus newspaper, the* Williams Free Press.

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Feeling ill-equipped to answer this question, I called my father in Milwaukee for advice. He tends to be right about most things, and in any case it is always comforting to hear his thick Israeli accent. This time, though, our conversation did not exactly begin reassuringly; I got about halfway through explaining why the seder was pressing on my mind before he interrupted anxiously.

"Wendy-Sweetie! I *must* tell you," he began in his best You-Are-on-the-Brink-of-Taking-a-Wrong-and-Irreversible-Turn-in-Life-and-Thank-God-I-Caught-You-in-Time voice. "You're making, I think, much too big of a deal about this whole thing to begin with. In Israel, when I was a schoolboy, we used to do parodies of seders *all the time*. It was very funny. We would make up little skits—Shmuel, Eli, Pinchas, and me. Sometimes Aaron too. In the story of the four sons, Shmuel was the wicked one, Eli was the stupid one, and Pinchas was the one who didn't know how to ask any questions. And I wrote the script, so you can guess who was the wise one." We both laughed, and then he continued:

"Wait, it gets more funny. And sometimes, the Four Questions would be like, 'Why do we have to do algebra?,' or 'Who is the prettiest girl?,' and the plagues would be the bell, gym, lab, and Shapiro, who was our principal. Now, of course, our teacher, if we were caught, would say, 'Cut out that nonsense' or something like that, but still, it was very funny while it lasted. So you see, my point is you should just laugh at this whole thing and stop worrying. It's really very funny, actually. Where's your sense of humor? Don't you have better things to do with your time, anyway? Have you run out of books? I can send you more books. . . ."

No, I had not run out of books. I did keep thinking about the seder, though, partly because I was soon to be treated to an onslaught of abusive mail after my criticism of it appeared as an editorial in our campus conservative paper.* One organizer of the seder went so far as to accuse me of "highly unethical conduct" because I "had come to the seder with [my] politics in [my] prayerbook." *They* have a feminist seder, and *I* was the one with politics in my prayerbook.

I did, however, have one fruitful conversation with a religiously observant student on the board of the Jewish Association. How, I wanted to know, could he condone an exercise whose entire stated purpose was to challenge the authority of the *halakhah*, Jewish religious law? I was surprised when he agreed with me wholeheartedly on the merits, but went on to argue there was nothing he could do or say about the seder. As he put it to me, "the Talmud says if you criticize someone, it's like killing them."

So, I demanded to know, what if the feminists started to build a golden calf in the Jewish Center? "Wendy, you always come up with these extreme examples that have no relationship to reality," was his response. Perhaps. But I suspect that if, 30 years ago, someone had suggested that the Ten Plagues would soon be revised to include the Lack of Acceptance of Lesbianism, he would have been laughed out of *shul*.

And there, it seemed to me, lay the danger: the slow erosion, by the combined forces of political correctness and the spirit of free-swinging deconstruction, of whatever could be legitimately thought of as the core of Judaism. And feminist seders were hardly the only sign of this process at work.

Thus, a month after the seder, our Jewish Association met to discuss how to get more people to attend Sabbath services. The proposals ran from less Hebrew, to more social events, to "outreach" with the various environmental, feminist, bisexual, gay, and lesbian groups on campus. If the crowds still failed to materialize, it was suggested, perhaps we might take a campus-wide poll, asking, in effect, "Is there anything about services, besides the Hebrew of course, that offends you, or makes you uncomfortable?" I could not resist proposing that we save ourselves time and bother by just throwing a party every Friday night and calling it services. Later I was told by a member of the board that my comment was "not appreciated."

"If . . . Jewish life is to have a claim to authenticity," wrote Emil L. Fackenheim many years ago in these pages, "then there must be a sense in which the Jewish past has authority."† Today, the question is less whether Judaism is "authentic" than whether "authenticity" can be said to exist. Rare is the college student who has not been taught to treat concepts like tradition and authority with total irony—to be "exposed," in academic parlance, as "storehouses for the interests of the privileged," and to be replaced by the claims of whatever is the fashion of the moment.

But this does not mean that those who reject Jewish authority feel obliged to find some other name for what they do. On the contrary, in today's anything-goes world, they can do whatever they want and insist it is somehow—perfectly—Jewish. And why not? Once one has cleansed oneself of the "illusion" of any determinate, identifiable Jewish tradition, an infinite variety of Judaisms abounds. Why *not* say "*Dayenu*" for Andrea Dworkin? Why not say "*Shmayenu*," for that matter?

Of course, it will not come to that. Although deconstructing feminists insist that they mean to fill the bad old patriarchal space of tradition with a more accommodating sort of "creative Jewishness," what they end up cramming into that space is *their* tradition, which, if anything, is a much more rigid and unaccommodating one

* It seems my offending lines were: "Passover is fundamentally about the retelling of a story, which has been passed on from generation to generation. Since *seder* in Hebrew means 'order,' it is painfully ironic that the feminists were creating so much disorder with their slanted view of the Passover story. . . . We understand that the Passover seder is often a time to explore the meaning of freedom today, but it wasn't even Passover, and this wasn't—in the meaningful sense of an orderly, accurate depiction of the Passover story—a seder. While we are sure the organizers of the Feminist Seder had only the best of intentions, the result was a political rally at the expense of Judaism, under whose mantle it took place."

† "The Dilemma of Liberal Judaism," October 1960.

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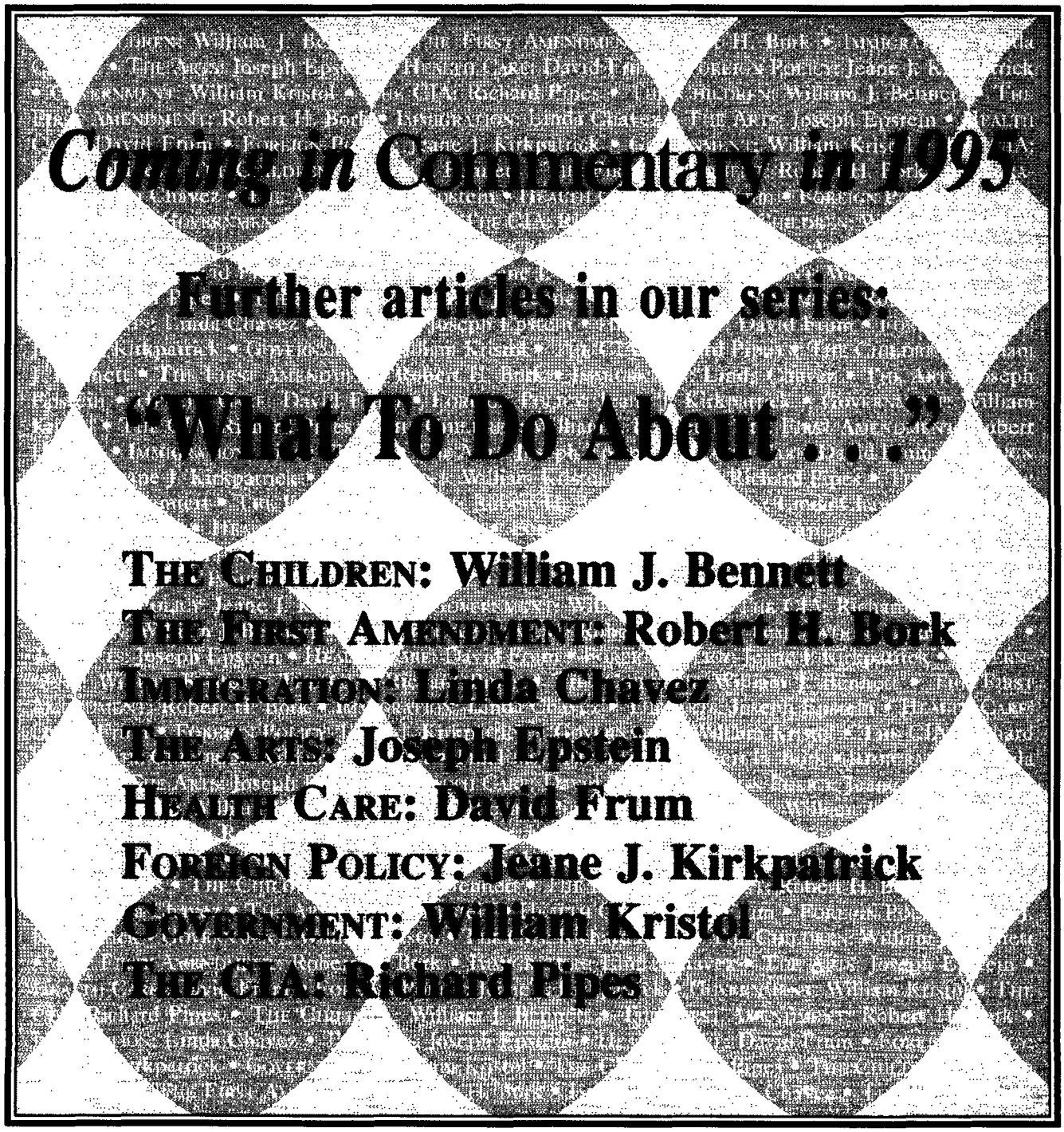
than the one they (often ignorantly) disdain. Try asking these apostles of creativity if, next year, the feminist seder might alternate with a homophobic one.

And so it strikes me that the battles being fought out at my college's Jewish Center, petty and risible as they seem, may be of a determining sort. After all, the difference between my father's Passover parodies in Israel and the feminist seder at my college's Jewish Center lies in a very simple detail: a parody presupposes something fixed to *be* parodied. Unfortunately, the feminists meant their seder not as a parody, but rather as something very serious indeed—so serious that it will, they hope, supplant "traditional" Jewish tradition.

Essentially, it comes down to this: those who want Judaism to revolve around their sexual preference, or their politics, or their weekend schedules, have their tradition—call it the Miss Mary O'Toole tradition—and those who want Judaism to revolve around God have theirs. As between the two, those who take their tradition the more seriously will win.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For Whom It Tolls

THE BELL CURVE: INTELLIGENCE AND CLASS STRUCTURE IN AMERICAN LIFE. By RICHARD J. HERRNSTEIN AND CHARLES MURRAY. *Free Press. 845 pp. $30.00.*

Reviewed by CHESTER E. FINN, JR.

IS THERE anyone left with access to a microphone, television camera, or printing press who has not unburdened himself of an opinion of *The Bell Curve*? I cannot recall a serious book provoking such a gusher of commentary. It has already been a subject of discussion at a presidential press conference. Pundits have had a field day. Cover stories in news and opinion magazines have featured the book and its authors. Besides the several hundred-thousand copies now circulating, millions more people have seen press accounts of it, some of them incorporating reasonably faithful summaries of what it says.

As any author can attest who has brought forth a book and waited months for even the hometown paper—let alone the *New York Times*—to review it, the instant celebrity accorded *The Bell Curve* is astounding, the more so when one hefts this weighty tome and finds it chockablock with charts, graphs, tables, statistical exotica, and technical appendices. Though the authors strove to make it accessible to a general audience as well as to scholars and policy-wonks, this is not a volume that one is apt to read for relaxation. So why has it entered the national consciousness like a noseful of cocaine?

The reason, of course, is its provocative discussion of inherently controversial subjects: intelligence, genetics, race, and the relationship of this trinity to success or failure in American society. To make matters even touchier, the authors state facts and draw conclusions that violate longstanding taboos.

These taboos that have led some thoughtful people concerned with preserving social harmony to adopt a "shouldn't-have-written-it" line. "I ask myself," concludes Nathan Glazer in a sorrowful comment in the *New Republic*, "whether the untruth is not better for American society than the truth." But, with exceptions that can be counted on one hand, most of *The Bell Curve*'s critics do not much seem to care whether what the book says is true.

Their main project has been to hurl enough brickbats to drive both book and authors out of the public square. The objective, it is apparent, is to restore the taboos and to intimidate anyone else who would dare violate them again. Since Herrnstein died of cancer as the book was being published, Murray has taken most of the blows (though a few grim commentators have sought to trash Herrnstein's reputation as well).

Of course, Murray has been driving liberals to distraction for years. His earlier books, *Losing Ground* (1984) and *In Pursuit of Happiness and Good Government* (1988), and myriad articles and op-eds (most famously, his 1993 *Wall Street Journal* essay on "The Coming White Underclass") have established him as perhaps our most influential critic of the modern welfare state and its social consequences. Bringing him down would be no small accomplishment for the Left. Yet however the attempt to do so may ultimately affect Murray's reputation and the impact of his ideas in policy arenas such as welfare reform, thus far it seems mainly to have pumped up *The Bell Curve*'s sales.

If anything, the intensity of the campaign against this book is powerful evidence of the deep roots that the presumed mutability of intelligence has in our educational arrangements, in our public policies, in our popular culture, and in widely held Western religious beliefs about the perfectibility of man. Americans, especially, want to regard intelligence much as they do physical fitness, family income, or the state of one's lawn: if you really work at it, you can do something to improve it. That is why test-score-boosting courses are proliferating, as are magazine articles that counsel parents on how to raise their children's IQ. Intellect, it is thought, can be pumped up along with one's triceps.

Certainly that is what we preach and teach. Private whispers sometimes take on a more cynical tone, perhaps accompanied by a knowing wink: so-and-so really isn't very bright; she's been promoted a level beyond her ability; he's obviously an "affirmative-action hire," not smart enough to get the job on merit. And so forth.

That what we say in public is not necessarily what we think when it comes to intelligence is partly hypocrisy, partly manners, and partly fear of the culture cops. But there is more: many of us actually do hold two conflicting views of intelligence.

On the one hand, we know intelligence is not uniformly distributed and that it matters whether one has a little or a lot. As with other forms of talent—artistic, musical, athletic, etc.—we do not really expect everyone's intellect to be the same and we accept the fact that those who are smarter are apt to get farther in life.

Yet, on the other hand, most of us bridle at the thought that any given individual's prospects are inexorably shaped or bounded by intelligence alone. It is too simple, too pat, too . . . un-American, especially when we have all met smart people who are shiftless, unprincipled, or irresolute, and others who may not be geniuses but whose enterprise and decency have carried them far.

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When it comes to groups, our attitudes are still more complex, our public utterances even more muted. There has been a virtual ban in contemporary America on general statements about the typical or average abilities of certain demographic fractions. It is presumptively racist (sexist, etc.) to draw comparisons among groups, let alone to infer anything about an individual from average or typical characteristics of a group to which he belongs. All comments along those lines are best kept to oneself, or made behind sealed doors. And that is pretty much what happens—except when an article or book like this one appears.

The taboo has three roots. The first is political correctness in all its chilling power. Recall the storms that descended on eminent scholars like Arthur Jensen and (from an earlier work) Herrnstein himself when they dared to report research indicating that IQ is more dependent on heredity than on environment. Though Herrnstein said nothing about race, he was smeared as a racist along with Jensen, who had pointed to evidence—since confirmed in hundreds of studies by dozens of scholars—that the average IQ of blacks is lower than that of whites. Today, as we know, the PC police are even more numerous and heavily armed.

The taboo's second source is a widespread and historically-based view of how groups get ahead in America. There is a well-worn path that most groups have followed from poor immigrants to working class to solid middle class to—at least for some—status, distinction, and wealth. In such a land of opportunity, we think it wrong to suppose that where a group is today has much to do with where it may be tomorrow.

Third, a great deal is at stake—for a great many people—in the "nature-nurture" debate. We have elaborate institutional arrangements—and lots of professional careers and taxpayer dollars—riding on the proposition that nurture matters more. Is it not true, as the educators say, that "all children can learn"? Cannot early intervention—prenatal health care, sound infant nutrition, high-quality day care, Head Start, and so on—launch children on the path to success, even if their parents are poor or not very bright? Will not mentoring programs, tutoring, summer camp courtesy of the Fresh Air Fund, after-school activities, midnight basketball, and the professional ministrations of counselors and social workers enable even the most seriously disadvantaged to make it in the end?

Those are three of the main reasons why prudent Americans have assiduously eschewed generalizations about the abilities of groups. And that is the environment into which *The Bell Curve* landed. Though written with care (and often erring on the side of caution), it thumbs its nose at the taboos. It overturns innumerable applecarts. It challenges all manner of assumptions, social programs, and institutional arrangements. And it contains a trove of useful information, insight, and analysis—as well as some assertions that may not be so solidly founded.

As is now well-known, the book's

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primary thesis is that intellectual ability (of which, the authors prove beyond much doubt, IQ is a serviceable indicator) makes a huge difference in American life both for good and for ill, and that a new kind of stratification is emerging as members of the "cognitive elite" fare ever better and the dull-witted underclass ever worse. Though we cannot know whether an individual will follow, beat, or lag behind the probabilities for his intelligence range, we can generalize about what is likely to happen to "typical" members of that range: smart people gain wealth, success, and status, while stupid people are apt to be poor, dependent, and on the margins of society, if not outcasts or outlaws.

Murray and Herrnstein offer the most extensive documentation to date of these propositions, and their display of the relationship between intellect and success is the book's most distinctive contribution. The authors also proffer compelling evidence that stratification by intelligence is largely a development of the 20th century, especially of the past several decades, and is fueled by changes in the marriage and labor markets, and above all by the "sorting" mechanisms of higher education.

Universities that as recently as 1950 were preserves of the well-born and well-to-do (but frequently less-than-brilliant) had, by the 60's, become places that screened applicants primarily for intellectual prowess. Enhanced social mobility has made it easier for the "cognitive elite" to live, work, and socialize primarily within itself, and has encouraged "assortative mating" that leads smart people to marry other smart people and raise smart children. In the world of work, one can no longer count on landing (much less keeping, or being promoted from) a good job because of social standing, parental influence, or membership in the right club.

The combined force of these trends tends to reinforce the isolation of the new elite. And not only in America:

> [M]odern societies identify the brightest youths with ever-increasing efficiency and then guide them into fairly narrow educational and occupational channels. These channels are increasingly lucrative and influential, leading to the development of a distinct stratum in the social hierarchy.

The meritocracy, it seems, is working incredibly well.

That is a triumph, of sorts, but more than a little irony inheres in this tale. Our success in opening and equalizing opportunity, tearing down old barriers, and shrinking the influence of race, religion, gender, and hereditary status with respect to who gets ahead has placed more of a premium than ever on intellect. But in lowering the traditional barriers, say Herrnstein and Murray, new and seemingly intractable problems have appeared.

For one thing, not everyone is equally well-equipped with brainpower for the meritocratic sweepstakes. This is not in and of itself terribly worrisome. People have different strengths they can bring to bear in the struggle to get ahead: some sing better, others are more beautiful, while others can swim faster, and so on.

But (for another thing) intellect is not merely spread unevenly among individuals; it is lumpy with respect to population subgroups too. Although innate intelligence is distributed through the entire population on a "bell curve"—with most people near to the average and fewer at the high and low ends—the distribution varies by race and ethnicity, with the gap between black and white Americans no doubt posing the thorniest challenge of all to our race-sensitized society.

While high intelligence correlates with success, low intelligence correlates to a large and distressing extent with poverty, unemployment, illegitimacy, dependency, criminality, and other worrisome modes of behavior. Herrnstein and Murray take pains to point out that low intelligence does not necessarily *cause* these social problems. But that it is "prevalent" among people who manifest such problems is demonstrated by graph after graph. High proportions of problem-plagued people come from the bottom fifth of the intelligence distribution: 48 percent of those living in poverty; 66 percent of high-school dropouts; 57 percent of "chronic" welfare recipients; 52 percent of women giving birth to illegitimate children; and so forth.

The point is that any purposeful effort to solve such problems must take account of the fact that many of the people afflicted by them are also not very bright:

> Do we want to persuade poor single teenagers not to have babies? The knowledge that 95 percent of poor teenage women who have babies are also below average in intelligence should prompt skepticism about strategies that rely on abstract and farsighted calculations of self-interest. Do we favor job-training programs for chronically-unemployed men? Any program is going to fail unless it is designed for a target population half of which has IQ's below 80.

Most troubling of all, intelligence is to some degree inherited, hence not wholly malleable through pre- and post-natal intervention schemes. The authors say that respectable scientific evidence yields estimates that intelligence is from 40 to 80 percent determined by inheritance. They opt for the middle of that range—i.e., for the proposition that intelligence is three-fifths the product of nature, and two-fifths the product of nurture. This means that all efforts to boost intelligence (parenting, schooling, and sundry social programs) must work whatever miracles they can within the limited span of 40 percent.

To ASK a question that few of their critics have asked: how true is what Murray and Herrnstein have to say? It seems to me that there can be little or no doubt about their findings on the predictive power of IQ in relation to success and failure in contemporary U.S. society, or about the (current) differences in IQ among groups, or about the (partial) heritability of intelligence. But at least with respect to the crucial mutability-of-intelligence issue, some legitimate doubts can be raised that bear on individuals and groups alike.

A baby's brain is not fully formed at birth. Much of its devel-

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opment—physiological, neurological, cognitive—occurs in the early months and years of life, and there is ample evidence that the extent of this development is influenced by the experiences the baby has. Prenatal experience matters, too. Everyone knows that when a pregnant woman drinks heavily, smokes crack, or injects heroin, there is a good chance that her baby will be born with some neurological or cognitive impairment. Such behavior may not be easy to change, but neither is it genetically encoded or permanently fixed.

Moreover, success in life has to do with many factors besides raw intellect. Murray and Herrnstein acknowledge this with respect to individuals, meticulously distinguishing their fate from group generalizations and averages. But it almost certainly makes a difference for groups as well. Does anyone doubt that one of the major reasons East-Asian immigrants, for example, do so well (their average IQ is higher than that of whites) is that our society rewards the self-discipline and family cohesion that are highly prized in their tradition? When it comes to groups that are faring less well, there is no reason to believe that the cultural factors that today foster undesirable behavior are utterly inert and cannot, under the right conditions and with the passage of time, change for the better.

Finally, "intervention" strategies may not be so hopeless as Herrnstein and Murray conclude. Such thoughtful commentators as Douglas Besharov and E.D. Hirsch have cited evidence of institutions, programs, and actions that appear to have greater and more enduring positive effects on cognitive functioning than *The Bell Curve* concedes. The authors themselves mention a couple of these, notably adoption (at an early age, into a better family). Other wholesale shifts in a young child's environment, such as an outstanding orphanage or boarding school along the lines of Boys Town, would likely produce much the same result. Hirsch cites data from long ago and other countries suggesting that topnotch day-schools and good pre-schools may perform better in boosting intellect and reducing gaps than the contemporary American educational institutions that comprise most of Herrnstein and Murray's data base.

WE CERTAINLY cannot afford to be romantic about intervention. We have tried a thousand times in a thousand ways to reduce, compensate for, or simply paper over differences in innate ability. Frequently such enterprises have made matters worse. The pursuit of "equity" in American education, for example, has leveled and dumbed-down schools and colleges to a point where gifted youngsters get short shrift, standards are slack or nonexistent, and many institutions (not the handful of selective ones favored by the "cognitive elite") now admit everyone, offer few incentives for high achievement, and confer diplomas and degrees that signify less and less.

Well-intentioned government policies, in short, have not substantially solved the social problems associated with the "bell curve" and in some respects have exacer-

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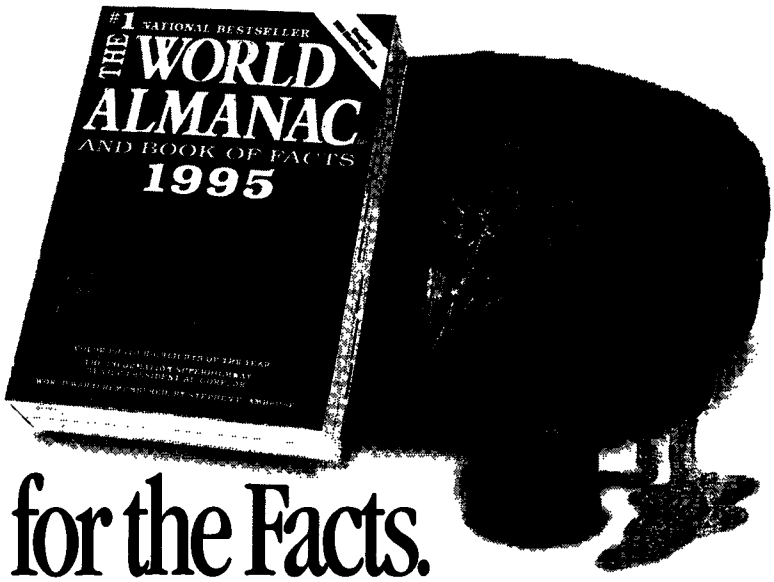

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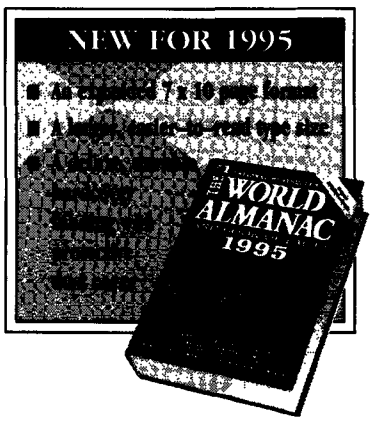

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bated them. If we continue on our present course, Herrnstein and Murray predict in a bleak, apocalyptic, chapter, reminiscent in its language of the (1968) Kerner Commission report on race in America:

> [T]hese trends will lead the U.S. toward something resembling a caste society, with the underclass mired ever more firmly at the bottom and the cognitive elite ever more firmly anchored at the top, restructuring the rules of society so that it becomes harder and harder for them to lose.

If they are right about this, we could find ourselves facing the greatest pressure ever for quota-style affirmative action. Herrnstein and Murray are strongly opposed to affirmative action of this kind, but if the meritocracy serves to trap entire castes of society within menial jobs, low incomes, and third-rate educational institutions, we might expect intensifying interest in curbing the meritocratic system. Considerable segments of the public (remember that 50 percent of the population, by definition, is distributed somewhere along the bottom half of the IQ bell curve) might insist that our government should reallocate the opportunities and benefits that flow to the cognitive elite, much as India reserves growing fractions of its university places and civil-service jobs for members of the "scheduled castes." No matter that such policies would shackle economic growth and technological progress; we will be told that social justice demands the sacrifice.

And if such pressures fail to materialize, will we then proceed toward the kind of grim future that Murray and Herrnstein forecast: a bifurcated society in which the able and affluent do "whatever is necessary to preserve the mansions on the hills from the menace of the slums below," including the emergence of a "custodial state" that will treat the underclass much like Indians on a reservation?

My own view is that only some aspects of this dark future are at all likely to arrive. People with means surely have ample incentive to continue investing in their suburban homes, private schools, guards, transportation arrangements, catalogue shopping, and other forms of insulation from violence, squalor, and mediocrity. But I do not see much likelihood that "custodial" care will be imposed on the underclass, save perhaps for those who commit violent crimes and are incarcerated. Indeed, our obsession with the rights of biological parents (and the race of adopting parents) impedes such promising forms of custodianship as orphanages and adoptions.

If anything, the underclass has plenty of champions in the U.S. these days, ranging from a Department of Education that will not permit states to administer high-school-graduation tests, to a Congress that came within a whisker of applying racial quotas in the imposition of capital punishment, to universities more apt to recruit a minority youngster of middling talent and weak achievement than a winner of the National Merit Scholarship who had the bad luck to be born white. Though such practices certainly smack of paternalism, I do not believe they point in the direction of reservations for the underclass or the "custodial state" that Herrnstein and Murray predict.

ONE can reject Herrnstein and Murray's grim vision of walled villas and squalid *favelas* without quarreling with their recommendations about how to fend off this fate. What they suggest would be entirely sensible even if, somehow, the many problems that stem from stratification by intelligence were miraculously solved.

First, they say, we should restate the principle of equality in terms that require everyone to be accorded equal liberty, not vouchsafed equal outcomes. Second, not everyone need be a rocket scientist to deserve respect: the fellow who collects the trash or drives a cab should be valued for the contribution he makes, which might also include coaching a Little League team or singing in church. Everyone, smart or slow, should be encouraged to find his own "valued place" in society. And third, simplify the overcomplicated rules that permeate our lives, whether they have to do with earning a living or anticipating the consequences of bad behavior like criminality and illegitimacy. It should not require a high IQ to pay one's taxes—or to know that one is responsible for the support of any children one may bear.

Those are all eminently sound ideas as far as they go, yet I nevertheless found the last few chapters in which they are elaborated the weakest portion of *The Bell Curve*. After working through more than 400 pages of analysis with mounting alarm over the direction in which they suggest our nation is heading, one may be forgiven for anticipating a more comprehensive set of policy recommendations.

But perhaps Herrnstein and Murray judged the book would already cause enough of a stir. If so, they were probably right. Certainly, the controversy ignited by *The Bell Curve* has been stunningly fierce. It will continue in the pages of scholarly journals, where, given the leanings of today's academic social scientists, many of the next round of reviews will surely be negative. The book's reception by the new Congress and governors, on the other hand, may be more respectful.

Still, even if only half or one-quarter of this book endures the assault, its implications will be as profound for the beginning of the new century as Michael Harrington's discovery of "the other America" was for the final part of the old. Richard Herrnstein's bequest to us is a work of great value. Charles Murray's contribution goes on.

Beyond the Confederacy

THE SOUTHERN TRADITION: THE ACHIEVEMENT AND LIMITATIONS OF AN AMERICAN CONSERVATISM. BY EUGENE D. GENOVESE. *Harvard. 138 pp. $22.50.*

Reviewed by PETER L. BERGER

EUGENE D. GENOVESE, one of America's most distinguished historians, has previously written extensively about different aspects

PETER L. BERGER *is University Professor at Boston University. His books include* The Pyramids of Sacrifice, The Capitalist Revolution, *and, most recently,* A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity.

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of Southern history. Now, in this volume—succinct, erudite, and eloquent—he describes and (at any rate partially) praises the distinctive Southern tradition of conservatism, from its beginnings to the present time.

As with some of Genovese's earlier writings, there is a certain paradox at work in this enterprise. Here is a scholar self-identified as a man of the Left, writing with much sympathy about what is probably the most robustly conservative strand in American political thought. Genovese, of course, is fully aware of the paradox, and he forthrightly explains his affinity with this tradition. Indeed, he argues that its story may contain lessons for a Left seeking to come to terms with the collapse of Marxism. It is this aspect of the book that makes it interesting far beyond its historical subject matter.

Genovese's fellow historians will have to assess whether he has anything new to say about the course of the Southern tradition, but in general that course is well known. Its origins lie far back in the antebellum period. In the early 19th century, probably the most famous representative of Southern conservatism was John C. Calhoun, who defended the South against its detractors but in the course of doing so propounded a distinctive view not only of the federal Constitution, but of the very nature of the American experiment.

Already then (if anyone had been interested), there were curious affinities between this Southern ideology and a still-nascent Marxism. Calhoun's attacks on capitalism, and on what he thought of as the fraudulent democracy of the North, strikingly resembled critiques of the same phenomena coming from the Left. In particular, some of Calhoun's descriptions of the alleged miseries of "free labor" in the North could have been lifted unchanged from *The Condition of the Working Class in England* by his contemporary, Friedrich Engels—or, conversely, Engels could have copied them from Calhoun. As far as I know, the two were unaware of each other; but the resemblance is striking and instructive.

In Calhoun's time, to be sure, an important ingredient of the Southern ideology was the defense of slavery. Needless to say, Genovese has no sympathy for this aspect of the tradition—but, he argues, the core of the tradition can be detached from it. He is not alone in his position. The same argument was made repeatedly by the so-called Agrarians, a group of Southern intellectuals whose manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, was published in 1930 (by a New York publisher, no less).

In that book, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, and other poets and writers not only addressed their fellow Southerners but presented to a wider public what they believed to be a better view of American realities. More recent representatives of the Southern tradition, Richard Weaver and M.E. Bradford, similarly addressed a national public. The contemporary journals *Southern Partisan* and *Chronicles* continue to claim that the tradition has significance far beyond the South. While their strand of political thought has not become dominant in American conservatism, it has exerted considerable influence and still does so, and not just in the South.

THE Southern tradition is the closest thing to classical European conservatism on this side of the Atlantic; it is for good reason that the 18th-century statesman and political theorist Edmund Burke has all along been one of its favorite authors. Like Burke, the Southerners have written in defense of the unreflected, taken-for-granted virtues (cf. Burke's famous image of tranquilly grazing English cattle). Like Burke, they have been highly skeptical of abrupt, revolutionary change, instead favoring gradual, "natural" reform. Like Burke, they have mistrusted rationalism and the social engineering to which rationalism gave birth, and have put their faith in custom, instinct, and emotional attachments (which both he and they understand by "prejudice"). Thus, one can usefully compare the Southerners' critique of American society with Burke's earlier critique of the French Revolution.

The Southerners' commitment, in Genovese's words, was and continues to be to "a culture of folk and feeling, with its resistance to a dialectical mode of discourse." There was and is a strong religious base to this view of society, a belief in "an objective, knowable, God-centered universe." The social order it envisages is hierarchical, accepting of human inequality. (Genovese argues, again, that this is *not* necessarily linked to race.) In all these respects, Southern theorists can feel at home with the central tradition of European conservatism.

At the same time, however, the Southerners have always been republicans. Unlike many of their European cousins, they have not sought some sort of feudal restoration. But they have certainly interpreted the Constitution and the American national identity in their own manner, a manner sharply different from the "abstract democracy" that has been the typical understanding of the North.

As a historian, Genovese thinks that the early Southern conservatives were quite correct in their construal of the Constitution, which, "whatever else may be said of it, embraced a tacit agreement to have peaceful coexistence between two social systems based on antagonistic systems of property and attendant moral principles." As between these two competing views, he adds, "The Yankee interpretation of the Constitution prevailed not because it was intellectually superior but because the North won a test of physical strength."

Genovese emphasizes that Southern political thought as a whole is not monolithic. Indeed, the particular Southerners he discusses in this book were at odds with other Southerners on various matters, not least in their understanding of tradition itself. To Genovese's Southerners, any system of thought that could be called traditional was based on historical continuity, on some sort of contract between the living and the dead. This stands in sharp contradiction to the dominant Enlightenment view, succinct-

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ly expressed by another Southerner, Thomas Jefferson, who, in a letter written to James Madison, quotes the radical Tom Paine: "I set out on this ground, which I suppose to be self-evident, 'that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living': that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it." It is logical that Jefferson should occupy an honored place in post-Civil-War liberalism; and it is logical that Calhoun should not.

WHAT does all this have to do with the recent disillusionments of American leftists? As Genovese himself points out somewhat defensively in his preface, one element of the tacit affinity between leftism and this brand of conservatism is that both are opposed to capitalism and bourgeois culture. More importantly, though, today's leftists, cured of the utopian delusions that led to the horrors of Stalinism, can find in this conservatism a realistic view of human nature and history that eschews radical egalitarianism.

Genovese confesses that he is alarmed by the "modernization" of today's South. One would like to know why he puts the word in quotation marks. Because he doubts the validity of the concept? Because he thinks that something else is occurring? In fact, his alarm may provide a clue to the paradoxical affinity, real or potential, between old leftists and these truly old rightists. The common feature is, precisely, their unease with modernity.

As it happens, one's attitude to modernity also serves as a fairly good locator of individuals and groupings within today's *conservative* ideological spectrum, for it tends to predict one's views concerning specific modern institutions like the market economy, the welfare state, the "alienating" culture of urbanism, and, last but not least, pluralism. Thus, there are conservatives who, with whatever reservations and reforming intentions, accept modernity and are willing to live with its institutional consequences; and there are other conservatives who do not accept it, and are unwilling to accommodate it. Not unexpectedly, it is the latter whose ideas frequently find a certain resonance on the Left.

BUT it is not necessary to share Genovese's affectionate feelings for this particular tradition to agree with him that there are lessons to be learned from it. Among those, minimally, is a wariness of centralized power (whether of the federal government or of the behemoths of capitalism); an instinctive preference for incremental as against radical change; an understanding of the role of religion and morality in the preservation of social order; and a commitment to those intermediate institutions (Burke's "little platoons") that link individuals to the larger society.

For example, Genovese suggests that, although the Southern insistence on states' rights is less relevant today than it might have been in the past, the same spirit of independence (and indeed defiance of overweening power, whether wielded by Washington or by any other homogenizing institution) can animate the defense of less powerful institutions.

In the Southern tradition, such ideas survived the collapse of the Confederacy, and Genovese believes that today they can help the Left (or, at least, individual leftists) survive the debacle of Marxism. And he suggests that conservatives, too, have lessons to learn from the Southern tradition, notably that there are limits to what capitalism can achieve and that one cannot, must not, replace society by the market.

Be that as it may, Genovese's hints throughout this book as to the *kind* of Left he would like to see are appealing as well as intellectually stimulating. One wishes he would write another book, spelling out his vision in full.

Bad Trip

THIS YEAR IN JERUSALEM. By MORDECHAI RICHLER. *Knopf. 292 pp. $23.00.*

Reviewed by EDWARD ALEXANDER

MORDECHAI RICHLER first came to prominence by virtue of two novels set among the Jews of Montreal. The first, *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1959), recounts the struggle of its hero, Noah Adler, to free himself from the prejudices and limitations of the Jewish community; the second, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959), later made into a movie, is a rags-to-riches story, formulaic but also satiric (it was reviled in some parts of the Jewish community). Since then Richler has written seven more novels, numerous screenplays, and, in 1992, a book (*Oh Canada! Oh Quebec! Requiem for a Divided Country*) severely critical of the Quebec separatist movement.

As we learn from his latest book, which is in part a memoir, Richler grew up in a hasidic family in Montreal. He attended a traditional religious school but also became involved in the Labor Zionist youth movement called Habonim, not out of strong commitment to Zionism but, as he freely admits, in order to spite his pious grandfather and lay hands on girls broken loose from the bonds of piety. But those "hallelujah days of Habonim" (as he calls them here) were also a time of moral certitude, when he still believed that Jews deserved a state of their own and that the best young people would leave the wasteland of the Diaspora, where Jews were destined for assimilation, and make their way to the land of Israel as pioneers.

Soon, however, Richler found that the American novelist John Dos Passos "spoke" to him more than Jewish writers did. His "ride into *goyish* culture," begun at Montreal's Sir George Williams University, was so "exhilarating" that in 1950 he set sail not for Tel Aviv but for Paris, where he lived for two years before going on to London for another twenty. So far had he emancipated himself "from childhood religious observances" that in 1951, he writes, he was surprised to find a kosher restaurant—to which he wished to take a Gentile friend—closed on Yom Kippur. Nor do the ensuing decades appear to have brought him back to Jewish sources: a reader, for instance, curious about the origin of a sentence Richler quotes here from an ancient rabbinic text, the

EDWARD ALEXANDER *is professor of English at the University of Washington. His most recent book is* The Holocaust and the War of Ideas *(Transaction Books).*

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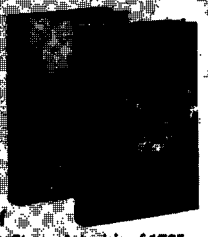

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Mishnah, will be directed by the endnote to consult Leo Rosten's *The Joys of Yiddish.*

Although Richler made a brief visit to Israel in 1962, it was not until 1984 that he became curious about the path not taken, about those old friends from Habonim in Montreal who had actually moved to the Zionist homeland. Still, he managed to restrain his curiosity for eight years until he was invited to be a guest at Jerusalem's Mishkenot Sha'ananim, an elegant guest house to which the Jerusalem Foundation invites artists and intellectuals, and so was afforded an occasion for writing this book.

This Year in Jerusalem combines Richler's talents as a chronicler with his new penchant for social-political criticism, now applied to Israel (whose prospective division into two states he contemplates far more favorably than the possible dismemberment of Canada). Insofar as a jerry-built book can be said to have a narrative skeleton, it is supplied by Richler's travels through Israel to look up his old friends from Montreal, ostensibly to show us what has happened, physically and spiritually, to comrades from the old neighborhood who now live in Israel's cities or kibbutzim.

Haphazardly draped over and obscuring this skeleton are recollections of his family, memoirs of growing up in Jewish Montreal, bits and pieces of Zionist history culled from secondary and tertiary sources, and political commentary on Israel and every other Jewish issue that happens to cross his field of vision. If there is a unifying theme underlying Richler's observations, it is Albert Einstein's declaration (of 1938), quoted as an epigraph and repeated in the fourth chapter—that the "essential nature of Judaism resists the idea of a Jewish state with borders" and that nationalism will cause severe "inner damage" to Judaism.

Readers familiar with the Israeli scene and its interpreters will find very little that is new in Richler. We get the standard horror stories about ultra-Orthodox religious leaders, the fulminations against religion by Israeli members of the Peace Now movement (to which Richler also belongs), a reactionary Moroccan-Jewish taxi driver, an Arab expelled from a home where his ancestors lived "for a thousand years," the incessant depiction of the 100,000 Jews living in the disputed territories as Uzi-toting lunatics expecting the Messiah to arrive next month, the repetition *ad nauseam* of the mindless slogan about how "you make peace with your enemies," and—this above all—the ritual depiction of Arabs as Jews.

Since Richler's preferred guides to the Israeli-Arab scene are the leftist journalist Amos Elon, the leftist novelist David Grossman, and *Village Voice* reporter Robert I. Friedman (who, Hillel Halkin once wrote, shows "how it is possible for a reporter to be thoroughly dishonest without telling too many outright lies"), he must know just how stale this formula is; yet he doggedly adheres to it throughout the book. Palestinian nationalism is for him the mirror-image of Zionism. Just as Grossman, in his *The Yellow Wind* (1987), likened a boy he saw on the roof of a house in an Arab refugee camp to a "fiddler on the roof," so Richler reports that Arab junk collectors in Jerusalem make their pitch in Yiddish. If Jews call Sukkot *Ha-chag*, then Arabs use the word *hagg* to describe the pilgrimage to Mecca. And so forth.

But the cultural aspect of this equation is trivial compared with the political-military. If 750 "collaborators" were executed by their fellow Arabs during the *intifada* (actually the number is much higher), then, admonishes Richler, we must recall that the Stern Gang (allegedly) did the same to about twenty Jews between 1940 and 1948. If it is really the case that the PLO is in collusion with Hamas, why then "its mirror-image was arguably the Zionist faction that was once led by Vladimir Jabotinsky." If Jews do not much care for "Hamas youngsters . . . sharpening their daggers in praise of Allah" (is that all they do with those daggers?), then the ever-ready Richler recommends that they contemplate "the God-crazed settlers wearing prayer shawls and phylacteries, Uzis protruding from their belts." (The exhortation to make peace with one's enemies would appear to extend only to enemies wearing *keffiyehs*, not to those wearing *yarmulkes* and *tefillin*.)

It never occurs to Richler to ask why, if the Palestinian Arabs are a distinct people requiring a distinct state, they (abetted by a thousand publicists) need to represent themselves as Jews. The answer is not far to seek: to misrepresent an aggression against the Jewish state as a case of victimization by that same state. Neither does Richler ask an equally obvious question about the missing element in his Arab-Jewish equation: in which cafés in Damascus have Syrian novelists argued for the legitimacy and moral necessity of Israel? In what purlieu of Montreal is there a Canadian-Arab writer making the case for the Jews?

ALTHOUGH *This Year in Jerusalem* is social commentary rather than fiction, it resembles Richler's novels in at least one important respect. Those books elicit disdain for the vulgarity of Montreal's Jews without ever showing anything that might complicate that vulgarity with the weight of the Jewish past; they display, in the novelist who wrote them, a lazy weakness for the easy target and the easy laugh. That laziness is still in evidence here. In fact, the same straw men into whose mouths Richler puts the crudest objections to his novels—"You earn big money writing novels that make fun of the Jews." "Are you a Jewish anti-Semite?"—turn out to be also the most foolish Zionist rams for his sacrificial knife.

Now and then, however, he overcomes his intellectual indolence and appears to sally forth against strong adversaries. One such is David Bar-Illan, executive editor of the English-language *Jerusalem Post*, Israel's most unabashedly Zionist newspaper and a standing affront to Diaspora visitors of the Peace-Now persuasion who (like Richler) do not read the Hebrew press. Declaring that he "almost never agree[s] with" Bar-Illan, Richler tries to rebut him.

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According to Richler, Bar-Illan's "case" against the Arabs is based on two shaky, irrelevant premises: one, that Palestine was a desolate land before the Zionist return; two, that the notion of a Palestinian-Arab identity is a recent invention, since, prior to the 1960's, the only people who called themselves Palestinians were the Jews. But, retorts Richler, even if the land had gone to ruin over the centuries, this did not justify the "stiff-necked" Jews coming in, saying "move over or get out" to Arabs who had tended their sheep and olive groves "for generations," whether they called themselves Palestinians or not. And besides, "the dispute is not about semantics."

It would be too much to expect a dilettante with Richler's prejudices to have delved into the history of high Arab in-migration into predominantly Jewish areas since the inception of Zionist settlement in the late 19th century, or to be aware that the coastal plain, for example, really *was* empty of population on the eve of Zionist settlement. But one might think that a person who earns his living as a writer would acknowledge the importance of words and the political potency of linguistic larceny. If semantics are unimportant, one wonders why Richler is so punctilious about referring to the "Old Testament" instead of the Hebrew Bible, about saying "West Bank" instead of Judea/Samaria, and "Greater Israel" instead of Land of Israel, or why he takes the trouble to include a glossary in which he disputes (for example) the definition of Fatah Hawks as terrorists.

Much later in the book Richler seems about to take on a second adversary: Hillel Halkin, an American who settled permanently in Israel in 1970. Halkin's *Letters to an American Jewish Friend: A Zionist Polemic* (1977) is one of the most important books to come out of Israel since the founding of the state, yet Richler could not, he complains, manage to read it because it is "out of print." (Apparently there are no lending libraries in Montreal.) Therefore, in preparation for a Tel Aviv meeting with Halkin, he read a short magazine essay by him so that he could paraphrase Halkin's argument for *aliyah*, Jewish immigration to Israel.

As usual, he gets it wrong. "Halkin's assumption that it was impossible to lead a full Jewish life in America was unnerving," Richler writes. But in his book Halkin says nothing of the kind. Rather the opposite:

> I am not saying that you cannot live an authentic Jewish life in the Diaspora; I am saying that if the criterion is the future of the Jewish people, you are living it in the wrong place.

Although he has only the vaguest idea of what Halkin's position is, Richler "refutes" it by listing a score of prominent, "caring" Jews who by virtue of living (and writing) in the Diaspora disprove the Halkin thesis. Had Richler taken the trouble to look, he might have thought better of this mode of argument. Here, for example, is what the late Irving Howe, one of Richler's Diaspora all-stars, wrote about *Letters to an American Jewish Friend*:

> When . . . Hillel Halkin sent from Israel a powerful book arguing that the Jews in the West now had only two long-range choices if they wished to remain Jews—religion and Israel, faith and nationhood—I searched for arguments with which to answer him. But finally I gave it up, since it seemed clear that the perspective from which I lived as "a partial Jew" had reached a historical dead end.

REPEATEDLY, from his Einsteinian epigraph until the book's end, Richler harps on the theme that Jewish nationalism, i.e., Zionism, is "contrary to what had evolved as the Jewish tradition." But in him this non- or anti-religious Diaspora "Jewish tradition" amounts to nothing but a puffed-up "pride" in Jewish neighborhood origins and a fossilized left-wing ideology. That is a considerably deader end even than the one Irving Howe confessed to, but it is in that dead end that Mordechai Richler complacently has chosen to live. This book shows it.

The Memory Hole

WINCHELL: GOSSIP, POWER, AND THE CULTURE OF CELEBRITY. BY NEAL GABLER. *Knopf. 681 pp. $30.00.*

Reviewed by DANIEL J. SILVER

SURELY for anyone born after World War II, the staccato-toned voice of the narrator of the television series *The Untouchables* is more familiar than the name of the man behind the voice: Walter Winchell.

Considering that Winchell was perhaps the most powerful gossip columnist of all time, and that in the 1930's and 40's he was an immensely influential political pundit, whose columns could be found in hundreds of newspapers across the country and whose voice was heard by over twenty million listeners on the radio every Sunday night, his disappearance from public memory has been astonishingly

DANIEL J. SILVER, *who reviewed Harold Bloom's* The Western Canon *last month, has taught English literature at a number of universities.*

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complete. Can his rise, fall, and subsequent oblivion tell us anything about the nature of the mass media, or about what Neal Gabler calls "the culture of celebrity"? These are questions that Gabler promises to address in his new biography.

Gabler, a one-time movie critic, is the author of *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (1988), a lively and informative though tendentious history of the early years of the movie business. With *Winchell*, Gabler takes yet another look at a familiar pattern: the story of how lower-class Jews—Winchell was the son of Russian immigrants—made their way to riches and into the American mainstream via the popular-entertainment industry. *Winchell* is clearly the product of prodigious research, and it makes a contribution by highlighting long-neglected aspects of American popular culture; but ultimately it disappoints.

WINCHELL was born Walter Weinschel in 1897. His father, the first-born of a large brood, was a ne'er-do-well who could never keep himself gainfully employed for any length of time; he was humiliated by the cruel taunts of his brothers who had come into money as stockbrokers, and who were embarrassed by their feckless sibling. Young Walter took all of this in, and would always harbor a deep resentment toward both his failed father and his aunts and uncles for tormenting him. He was determined to succeed, and to make the others eat crow, and that is how he remained.

Graced with a trim build, fair hair, and piercing blue eyes, Winchell made a dashing figure in his youth. It took him little time to cash in on his looks: his career in vaudeville was well launched while he was still a mere boy. He was to spend over a decade hoofing onstage, but along the way he also took up an interest in reporting on backstage gossip for a vaudeville trade paper. He enjoyed this so much he switched occupations, trading in his straw hat and cane for a reporter's fedora and typewriter.

Winchell learned early on how to cultivate contacts, one of the keys to his success when, still in his early twenties, he graduated from trade journalism to the tabloid press. Possessed of personal magnetism and incredible energy, he easily tapped into the rumor mills of Broadway, managing to convert a stream of raw tips into a titillating melange of fact and innuendo.

Though he certainly did not invent the gossip column, Winchell brought to it a refreshing, homegrown stylistic brew he called "slanguage," an artificial argot compounded of street talk, backstage jargon, his own neologisms, and wittily euphemistic slang expressions. His message and its breezy medium—at once clever, shrewd, vulgar, coy, cute, irreverent, and, above all, energetic and vital—were in perfect tune with the Roaring 20's.

The Depression, of course, dimmed the luster of Broadway, but not of Winchell's career. A new group of socialites—a young set with "old" money that had not been wiped out in the crash of '29—began frequenting hot, newly-opened nightspots like the Stork Club and El Morocco. Winchell became the great chronicler of this café society. The sensibility embodied in his column was that of someone who understood the "average Joe," but who was himself an urbane sophisticate. By mining the secrets and exposing the pretensions and vulnerabilities of the rich and famous, his column offered Depression-haunted readers a welcome distraction from their own deprivations and fears.

INCREASING wealth and fame did not satisfy Winchell's hunger for credibility as a serious journalist; his chance to break out of the confines of the gossip-columnist mold came, interestingly enough, with the rise of the Nazi menace in Europe. Thoroughly assimilated though he was, Winchell was also fiercely proud of his Jewish heritage, and he became one of the first American journalists to sound the alarm about the persecution of Jews in Germany. As the 1930's unfolded, Winchell presciently attempted to alert the nation to the dangers stirring in Europe, and urged Americans to prepare for war.

Winchell's success as a pundit, and his command of a vast audience both in print and increasingly on the radio, caught the attention of Franklin Roosevelt's advisers, and the new President made overtures to him. The immensely flattered columnist quickly became one of Roosevelt's biggest boosters; he served the administration well by readying public opinion for American entry into the coming war. At the same time, his efforts drew fire from strict isolationists, nativists, America Firsters, fascists, and the general run of anti-Semites. With enemies like these, Winchell's instinct to go for the jugular could be fully satisfied; the resulting verbal combat was much appreciated by his loyal fans, and he also found himself applauded by liberals who saw him as a champion of their cause.

Along with the cheers, however, came a sense of uneasiness on the part of some liberals, stemming from Winchell's charismatic power to shape public opinion and thereby influence the course of events. And, indeed, when angered—which was not seldom—Winchell knew few restraints. After it was revealed, for instance, that James Forrestal, President Truman's Defense Secretary, was lobbying within the cabinet against support for Jewish settlement in Palestine, Winchell launched a campaign of relentless ridicule that some would blame for Forrestal's suicide in 1949.

But by far the greatest opprobrium to descend on Winchell came in the 1950's from his involvement with Senator Joseph McCarthy and his counsel, Roy Cohn. After the war, Winchell increasingly regarded Soviet Communism as little better than Nazism, and by the end of the 40's he had begun to warn his audience that Soviet subversion would be the next great *casus belli*. The Left, of course, would have none of this, and after Winchell linked up with McCarthy, even many liberals were appalled. A full-scale campaign to discredit him got under way by 1951.

By now, Winchell was carrying a great deal of baggage, and had

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garnered more than his fair share of enemies. Even after he distanced himself from McCarthy, Winchell remained for years the target of attacks from the Left. Personal stubbornness compounded his political isolation. Despite a long record of castigating bigots and championing equal rights, Winchell earned the enmity of the NAACP when he refused to censure a friend, the owner of the Stork Club, who had shabbily treated the black entertainer Josephine Baker. (Not that Winchell thought his friend was justified, but he was incensed that anyone dared question the sincerity of his commitment to civil rights.)

Although these attacks helped to diminish interest in Winchell, he was finally undone not by politics but by the fantastic growth of television in the 1950's. He made a few forays into the new medium, but he never fit it very well. The end of his career was a slow, painful process, symbolized physically by the cancer that finally consumed him in 1972.

GABLER attends exhaustively to every minute detail of Winchell's life—so exhaustively, indeed, as to crowd out any reflections on its larger meaning. In this sense, the substantive discussion of the themes of "gossip, power, and the culture of celebrity" promised in the book's subtitle is never forthcoming. Nevertheless, we can draw some conclusions of our own.

A worry that surfaces periodically in American society is that some kind of charismatic figure will arise who will use the mass media to sway public opinion in disastrous directions. To judge by Winchell's career, such fears are largely exaggerated. Despite a firm hold over an audience of unprecedented size, Winchell could persuade people only when his ideas corresponded with attitudes already widely shared. When that condition no longer obtained, his popularity rapidly subsided.

Winchell's role as a gossip columnist may assume a particularly baleful aspect today in light of the media's obsession with the private lives of celebrities and politicians, an obsession that has reached gargantuan proportions and seems to be contributing to the breakdown of civility in our society. True, there was nothing in Winchell's time to rival the explicitness of, say, the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, next to which his tattletales seem tame and positively prudish. But did he initiate this malignant trend?

Whatever his own excesses, it seems hard to blame Winchell for our current practices, which clearly issue from causes of more recent origin and more comprehensive scope. In this connection, however, perhaps one can take a modicum of comfort from the oblivion to which Winchell was so thoroughly consigned after his death. It would be nice to think that, three or four decades hence, the same fate will have thoroughly enveloped his infinitely less worthy, less talented, and less interesting epigones in the television age.

Herstory

A HISTORY OF WOMEN IN THE WEST, VOLUME V: TOWARD A CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. EDITED BY FRANÇOISE THÉBAUD. *Harvard. 597 pp. $29.95*

Reviewed by NANCY W. YOS

Caveat emptor. The title of this book—the fifth and crowning volume in a series—is misleading. It is not a history of women in the West, at least not one that is complete. For the most part a production of French academics, it focuses almost wholly on Europe, to the near-total exclusion of at least one major Western country—namely, the United States. Moreover, the one chapter devoted to America, "The Modern Woman of the 1920's, American Style," is concerned solely with the hygienic American consumer-Mom of academic fantasy, no mention being made of, for instance, the day-to-day liberties enjoyed by American women that have amazed foreign observers since Tocqueville's time.

In her introductory essay, "Explorations of Gender," the editor of the volume, Françoise Thébaud, writes that its intent is to separate the weave of history into "threads"—law, business, and so on—and "engender" them; to make people see how all these threads come to history's loom stained with sexism and "symbolic violence"; and then to create a tapestry which will be whole. Certainly, the tapestry she has created is elegant in *appearance*: weighty in the hand, and handsomely bound. The prose, on the other hand, most of it translated from the French by Arthur Goldhammer, is often leaden, impenetrable, and clotted with jargon ("the differentiae of sexual difference are not objectifiable").

Nevertheless, in spite of the opaque writing, the tome's central theme emerges with crystal consistency: 20th-century women have strained to escape patriarchy and "phallogocentrism" and its horrible servant—motherhood—but are nowhere near fully free. In five sections, plus two general introductions, the reader is guided through women's struggle to poach in pa-

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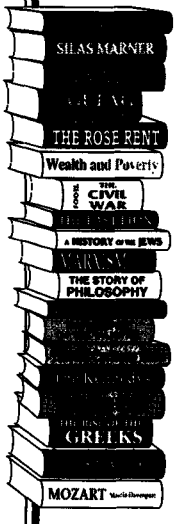

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triarchal Western preserves to achieve what is called here, delicately but comprehensively, "autonomous creativity outside the domestic setting." By and large, however, the only data provided are those concerning work, child care, and the state's attitude toward each. In their hypnotic, machine-like, turning and sifting of these topics, the contributing historians dutifully note which countries provide free day care, which have snatched away abortion rights, which politicians have praised motherhood too much, which have tried to abolish, which diabolically to encourage, the survival of the family.

Women's liberation is completely bound up in the thinking of these scholars with the desire and right to work outside the home. Whatever is in aid of this end (day care, unfettered access to abortion) is objectively good, whatever hinders it is bad. Thus, labor unions are held to be less than progressive because historically they have opposed women working at times when men with families could not find jobs. The welfare state is seen as nothing better than a mixed blessing; true, it has ushered in waves of feminist legislation, but it has also buttressed the family with "child-centered" welfare payments that enslave mothers in their homes.

The social sciences come in for attack, too: not only do they study the status quo in an undesirably neutral way, but they have been a tacit ally of American advertising in keeping women chained to a false ideal of housekeeping. Modern medicine likewise has a sinister side, thrusting upon women new and burdensome instructions concerning the proper care of children.

And children themselves are the worst of all, bringing physical danger, poverty, and frustration to the progressive female class. "The more children women have, the less they work outside the home," complains Rose-Marie Lagrave in a lengthy essay, "A Supervised Emancipation." The point she makes—children interfere with a woman's ability to work—is echoed repeatedly by others in this book.

In pursuing their remorseless theme, the authors lodge many truly weird claims and complaints. One of their number, for example, argues that war is valuable because it frees women to get men's jobs. Another maintains that *prosperous* countries cannot afford high birth rates. A third holds that wages high enough for a working man to support his family on his own are "exploitative" of the family. Meanwhile, the series editor offers praise for Germany's Baader-Meinhof gang for giving women command positions while "reformulat[ing] the terrorist tradition."

It would be unfair to criticize a collection of twenty essays ranging across all of 20th-century European history for telling, say, a disjointed story, or individual contributors for contradicting one another. But there are no such worries here. This book is a monolith. The writers do not disagree with one another or think independently; they simply follow any and all paths, however twisted and absurd, so long as they lead back to the closed circle of an ever more curious creed.

Missing the Boat

THE DREAM THAT FAILED: REFLECTIONS ON THE SOVIET UNION. By WALTER LAQUEUR. *Oxford. 231 pp. $25.00.*

Reviewed by GABRIEL SCHOENFELD

IN THE summer 1989 issue of a leading scholarly journal, A. James McAdams, one of America's top experts on East Germany, recounted a recent trip he had taken to East Berlin. The Communist officials with whom he met had impressed him, McAdams wrote, with "the air of quiet self-satisfaction" they displayed. The biggest potential problem facing East Germany, he concluded from his visit, was that the country's achievements were so formidable they might, if anything, prove to be obstacles to further progress. Several months after these words appeared under the title, "The GDR at Forty: The Perils of Success," McAdams suffered something of a professional misfortune: the German Communist regime collapsed.

McAdams was not the only knowledgeable observer who missed the boat. His views in fact were conventional wisdom among experts on East Germany in the United States, and more than a few of McAdams's colleagues, according to Walter Laqueur, "went considerably further in their belief in the achievements and stability of the GDR."

As Laqueur shows in *The Dream That Failed*, professional observers of Soviet politics by and large cannot claim a better record. "[W]ho got it wrong—basically, consistently, confidently—and why?" are perhaps the two most fascinating questions he takes up in a book that assesses seven decades of Western scholarship on the USSR and the Communist world. Once again, Laqueur, the author of numerous books and articles on Communist affairs and other aspects of contemporary history, tells us much that is truly worth knowing about a topic of genuine importance.

As for "who got it wrong?," Laqueur's answer is virtually everyone in the profession including himself. But not everyone "got it equally wrong"; differing degrees of intellectual delinquency can be assigned.

From the picture of the profession that Laqueur has assembled, experts writing about Russia two or so decades ago can be usefully divided into three groups. Fewer than a handful of observers argued at the time that the USSR would face a crisis so severe that it would likely topple the Communist regime. A somewhat larger contingent observed widening fault lines running through Soviet society, but most of these thought it unwarranted to issue a warning that a devastating political earthquake could hit. An astonishingly large number of experts saw the same fault lines, but insisted that Soviet Communism was all but earthquake-proof.

Of those who saw the disaster coming from afar—most famously the Soviet dissident Andrei Amalrik in his 1969 *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?*—La-

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queur maintains, without begrudging them their success, that they were largely accidental prophets, possessors of both brilliant insight into the regime's weaknesses and even more brilliant luck. Despite all of the visible socioeconomic rot, had the USSR's rickety social structure not been subjected to Mikhail Gorbachev's hapless efforts to brace things up, it could have remained standing for many long years. The Soviet populace, disaffected and exhausted as it was, was far from ready to explode in violence; in the end it was Gorbachev's ascension to power—hardly an inevitable development—that set in motion the revolution from above which brought about collapse.

For those observers who did not anticipate this course of events, Laqueur has written a brief setting forth the elements of an honorable and persuasive defense: the chain reaction that began slowly in 1985 and exploded in 1991 was as unforeseeable by American students of Communist affairs as it was by the rivals for power within the ruling Soviet Politburo itself. At worst, those who sounded the seismological alarm only after severe tremors had been detected, says Laqueur, had failed to grasp

> that the process of decay had proceeded much further than generally assumed, that the self-confidence of the leading stratum had largely been undermined, and that as a result the existence of the regime depended on mere accidents.

Adherents of the earthquake-proof school of Sovietology committed a far more radical and consequential type of blunder. Although this group includes some on the Right who overestimated the strength and durability of the Soviet regime, it is heavily dominated by "revisionist Sovietologists" of the Left, who in the 1970's had risen to positions of prominence in leading American universities and think tanks, and by the 1980's had become the profession's new "mainstream."

Although the revisionists were (and remain) a diverse group comprising historians, economists, and political scientists, they are united by the defining tenet of their creed: profound antipathy to the interpretation of Soviet politics that had gained broad influence following the publication of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951 and Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski's *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* in 1957. The older view that the Soviet Union was not a garden-variety dictatorship, but an extraordinary form of tyranny—ideological and expansionist in character—came to be regarded by the revisionists as offering an intellectual foundation and implicit justification for the Vietnam war and the cold war, and hence as self-evidently false.

WHAT led the revisionists astray? Laqueur's book suggests they committed virtually every kind of transgression—short of outright fraud—that a scholar can commit: ideological bias; uncritical treatment of data; a blinding preference for abstraction and generality over the particular and concrete; and an approach to their subject wholly at odds with the moral tradition that good scholarship demands.

These traits, as Laqueur's book shows, were all visible in the fierce assault that the revisionists launched against the concept of totalitarianism. It is easy to agree with the case made by Laqueur that the battle waged against this term—in barrage after barrage of articles and monographs—casts far more light on the climate of opinion on American campuses than on the nature of Soviet politics or anything else.

Certainly, the anti-anti-Communism that gave the attack its intensity was plainly evident in the benign interpretations of Soviet history and politics that the revisionists embraced. To refute the "myths" fostered by historians whose methods and conclusions were tainted by the "cold-war" totalitarian approach, the revisionists rewrote the Soviet past with methods they proclaimed were "value-free" but which, in Laqueur's deservedly harsh judgment, made "a mockery of the search for historical truth."

The results of the "value-free" history bear out this verdict, and Laqueur has performed a public service by showing the misbegotten provenance of revisionist historiography's many less-than-precious gems. To cite just two examples of a genre that has not yet entirely disappeared, Lenin's seizure of power in a *coup d'état* in October 1917 was recast by the historian Alexander Rabinowitch as the expression of a genuinely popular, authentically democratic movement in which, in Rabinowitch's own words, "the Bolshevik party as a whole expressed the fundamental interest of the masses." In the same vein, the blood purges of the 1930's in which millions perished were portrayed by the historian J. Arch Getty as a period of great social mobility during which "many thousands" died when Stalin devoted insufficient attention to supervision of wayward underlings.

With Stalin's Great Terror depicted so mildly by historians, the political scientists among the revisionists could not but characterize the post-Stalin era in even more clement terms. The Khrushchev and Brezhnev years they described as a period of continued "modernization" in which the distortions stemming from rapid industrialization were ameliorated while the system as a whole was increasingly rationalized.

And if the notion of totalitarianism was held to be inapplicable to high-Stalinism, it was regarded as positively worthless as an aid for understanding the dynamics of the post-Stalinist age. Revisionist political scientists replaced the "decisively-refuted" approach with a multitude of new concepts such as "institutional pluralism" and "limited pluralism" that highlighted the "participatory" elements of Soviet political life which the "obsolete" totalitarian model had obscured from view.

Along with new models came research tools to match; not surprisingly, these were the same social-science techniques hitherto employed by political scientists in the study of *democracies* in the West. Laqueur cites a typical example: a 1988 committee report issued by Sovietologists from lead-

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ing universities that was "wholly preoccupied with operational definitions of variables, deductive theory, the interaction of multiple factors, predictive underdetermination," and so forth. "Model mania" is how one longtime nonrevisionist Sovietologist diagnosed the affliction that had overcome the profession. Another is quoted by Laqueur ruefully noting the paltry results of all the theoretical toil: "[E]very important event that has taken place in the Communist world within the last few years or so has come as a surprise." Laqueur is entirely right in saying that the failed track record of Sovietology "raises searching questions concerning the validity of much of contemporary social science."

APART from stuffing the heads of undergraduates with a toxic blend of sham history and political-science twaddle, what harm, if any, did all of this counterfeit scholarship wreak?

One count that could be handed down in a jury-proof indictment is that the revisionists provided U.S. foreign policy-makers with a spurious justification for reaching an accommodation with the USSR. To be sure, Richard Nixon's détente with Russia never rested on such a flimsy footing; Nixon and Henry Kissinger knew their way around the world well enough to elaborate a more convincing (if also ultimately flawed) rationale for their policy. But did Jimmy Carter know his way around so well?

If one recalls Carter's genuine shock and amazement when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, if one traces the intellectual roots of Carter's assertion that we were now free "of that inordinate fear of Communism" that had led us "to embrace any dictator who joined us in our fear," and if one flips through the roster of Carter's gullible foreign-policy advisers like his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, who described Leonid Brezhnev as "a man who shares our dreams and aspirations," there can be no doubt that many of the revisionists' false propositions about the USSR had become accepted wisdom in high places during Carter's presidential term.

In the Reagan years, when the revisionists were largely ignored by the executive branch, they still continued to provide a coherent, if utterly specious, rationale for the chorus of condemnation that greeted Reagan's effort to challenge the Soviet Union in the military, economic, and ideological sphere. "To believe that the Soviet economy is incapable of an adequate response to President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative," wrote one prominent revisionist economist in 1988, "is self-delusion." Fortunately, common sense and moral fortitude won out. By the end of the cold war, all the revisionists had really accomplished was to pave the way for one of the most pathetic scholarly debacles of all time.

Abroad, the revisionist scholarship had the baneful effect of demoralizing Russian dissidents. By the 1970's, thanks to *samizdat* and Western broadcasting, Russian intellectual life no longer existed in total isolation from the West; one underground channel or another conveyed what many Western scholars were saying. Sober-minded Russian intellectuals could not help being puzzled, disgusted, and dismayed as they read or heard things like this (from the same revisionist economist): "An egalitarian wage system, combined with subsidized prices for most necessities, fills out the USSR's institutionalized cushion of economic security which is unmatched in capitalist countries."

Or like this: "The Soviet citizen—worker, peasant, and professional—has become accustomed in the Brezhnev period to an uninterrupted upward trend in his well-being. . . ."—which is how the political scientist Seweryn Bialer of Columbia University characterized life in the USSR. Conspiratorially-minded Russians, for their part, became convinced that a great number of American professors were "agents of influence" in league with the KGB in a terrible plot to keep Russia enslaved. To this day, many of them fail to understand, as Laqueur points out, that the misjudgments "were self-administered and sincerely believed."

"Mainstream" Sovietology's final fiasco came after power passed from septuagenarian Leonid Brezhnev to septuagenarian Yuri Andropov to septuagenarian Konstantin Chernenko and finally to the relatively young Mikhail Gorbachev. The presentable new Soviet leader was hailed by the revisionists as the long-awaited representative of a new generation of reformers who at last would return socialism to the more humane and prosperous path that Lenin had envisioned all along, with Princeton's Stephen F. Cohen the cheerleader performing the most vigorous calisthenics on this count.

To the very end, the revisionists were insisting that Gorbachev and perestroika would prevail. In 1991, the Brookings Institution expert Jerry Hough confidently asserted: "[T]he belief that the Soviet Union may disintegrate as a country contradicts all we know about revolution and national integration throughout the world." For once, Hough was right. It did contradict everything he and his colleagues knew. By the close of the year, the Soviet Union was no more.

The revisionists, however, many of them tenured, others making foreign policy in the Clinton administration, are with us still.

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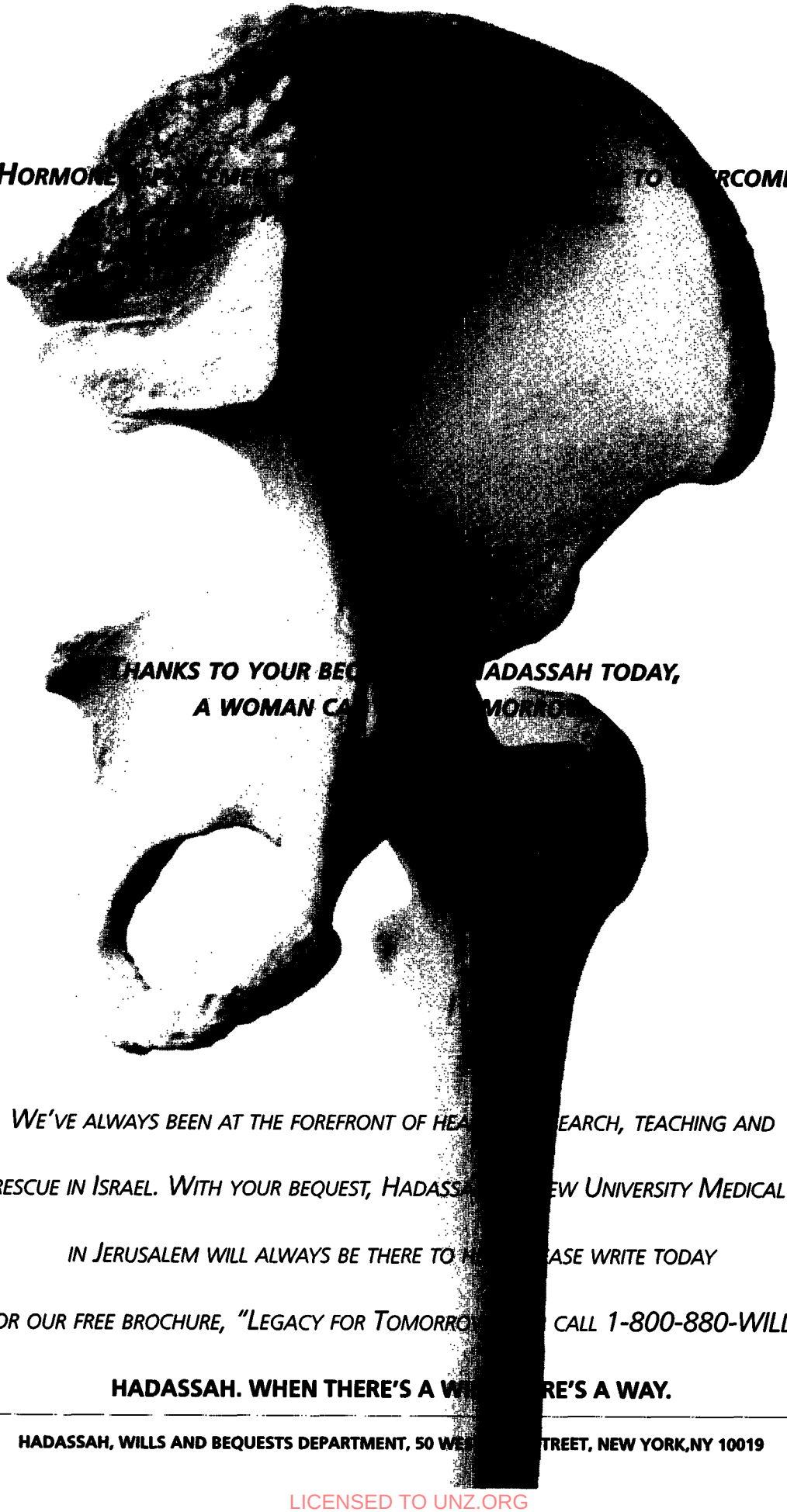

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There is no more daunting target on the agenda of scientific research than the replacement of fossil fuels with energy from the sun. If science triumphs, the use of inexhaustible, pollution-free solar energy will someday bring on an era of unprecedented health and prosperity. The world's decision makers often relegate solar research to the back burner when oil emergencies abate. But the challenge never vanishes in sun-drenched, resource-poor Israel. ❦ The Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot – equipped with spectacular, sophisticated solar furnace and solar tower facilities – is an acknowledged leader in solar research. Its experts pursue the development of new, cost-efficient ways to harness, store and transport the energy of the sun. ❦ Current Weizmann projects reflect ambitious goals: collecting solar energy in one country or region and shipping it to another by "solar energy pipeline"; producing hydrogen from water for use as a clean fuel; laser light produced by solar power instead of electricity; solar-heat gas turbines generating electric power. ❦ Albert Sabin once observed that the development of solar energy will benefit humanity more than any vaccine. Solar research merits support wherever sunshine inspires scientific imagination and skill.

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